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ACCENT

A QUARTERLY OF NEW LITERATURE

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HUGO VON HOFMANNSTHAL:

The Tale of the 672nd Night*

Translated by Stephen Fogle

A merchant's young son, very handsome and with neither father nor mother, grew bored with companionship and a hospitable life shortly after his twenty-fifth year. He shut up most of the rooms of his house and let all of his servants go, except for four, whose service and whole being were dear to him. Since he had no friends who mattered to him and since he had not been so taken with the beauty of any woman that he could imagine it either desirable or even bearable to have her always around, he lived a more and more lonely life, which apparently suited his character best. However, he in no way disliked mankind; often he would stroll in the streets or in the public gardens and observe the faces of men. He did not even neglect the care of his body and of his beautiful hands or the adornment of his house.

Yes, the beauty of carpets and tapestries and silks, of carved and paneled walls, of candlesticks and bowls of metal, of glass and earthen vases, came to mean more to him than he had ever thought possible.

* Hofmannsthal (1874-1929) deals in his early work with the same problem which obsessed Arthur Schnitzler and Thomas Mann, the problem of the relation of the superior individual, the artist, aesthete, or intellectual, to his environment. A sensitive poet, one of the earliest of the German literary impressionists, the leader of a school of Viennese "neo-Romantics," he chose materials from all the literatures of the world, from Greek drama (*Alkestis* and *Elektra*), from Greek myth (*Adriadne auf Naxos*), from English (*Jedermann* and *Venedig Gerettet*), and, as with the present story, from the Arabian Nights. Like Stefan Zweig and others, he was swift to explore the application of the Viennese psychological theories to literature. In America, he has been best known as the author of the text of *Rosenkavalier*.—S. F.

Little by little he realized that all the forms and colors of the world were to be found in his collection. He recognized in the entwined ornamentation an enchanted picture of the entwined wonders of the world. He discovered the forms of animals and the forms of flowers and the way flowers might change into animals; dolphins, lions, and tulips, pearls and the acanthus. He discovered the struggle between the thrust of the column and the counterthrust of the firm earth, and the surge of all water upwards and then down again. He discovered the sacredness of movement and the exaltation of rest; he discovered dancing and the existence of death. He discovered the colors of flowers and leaves, the colors of the skins of wild beasts and the faces of peoples, the color of gems, the color of the stormy sea and of the quietly shining sea. He discovered also the moon and the stars, the mystic bullet, the mystic rings, and the wings of the seraphim which had grown fast to the rings. He was intoxicated for a long time with this great, inherent beauty, which belonged to him, and all his days moved more beautifully and less emptily among these objects of art, which were no longer dead and low, but a great heritage, the divine work of all races.

Yet he felt the emptiness of these things just as much as their beauty; there never left him for long the thought of death, and it came to him often among laughing or weeping men, often in the night, often at meals.

But since he was not ill, there was nothing frightening about the thought; rather it had something grand and stately about it and came most strongly when he had intoxicated himself with fine thoughts and with the beauty of his youth and loneliness. For often the merchant's son wrought a great pride from his mirror, from the verses of the poet, from his own riches and cleverness; and the dark proverbs did not press upon his soul. He said, "Your feet will bear you to the place where you must die," and he imagined how a king, lost while hunting, might undergo a strange and marvellous fate in an unknown forest, beneath strange trees. He said, "When the house is completed, Death will come," and Death slowly crossed over from the palace, from the completed house, walking on the bridge borne on the backs of winged lions, and carrying the marvellous spoils of life.

He considered living completely alone, but his four servants surrounded him like dogs, and, although he spoke little to them, he felt nevertheless that, unobtrusively, they served him well. He even began occasionally to think about them.

The housekeeper was an old woman, whose dead daughter had

been the nurse of the merchant's son. All her other children were dead. She was very quiet, with the coolness of age in her white face and her white hands. But he was fond of her, since she carried with her the memory of the voice of his own dead mother and of his childhood, which he passionately loved.

With his permission she had brought into the house a distant relative, a girl hardly fifteen years old and very uncommunicative. She was very severe with herself and hard to understand. Once, in a dark and abrupt stirring of her wrathful soul, she threw herself from a window into the courtyard; however her childish body fell upon some garden-earth so that she broke only a collarbone. When they had put her to bed, the merchant's son sent a doctor to her, and in the evening came himself to see how she was. She kept her eyes shut, and for the first time he was able to look at her long and quietly, and was astonished at the odd and precocious charm of her face. Only, her lips were very thin, and in that thinness there was something ugly and unattractive. Suddenly she opened her eyes, looked at him icily and evilly, and, angrily biting her lips together to overcome her pain, turned toward the wall so that she lay on her injured side. Suddenly her deathly pale face faded to a greenish white; she fainted and fell back into her earlier position.

After she was well again, the merchant's son did not speak for a long time, if they happened to meet. A couple of times he asked the old woman whether the girl were unhappy in his house, but she always denied it. The single manservant whom he had decided to keep in his house he had found when he had dined one evening with the ambassador maintained in the city by the king of Paris. This man had served him there and had been so obliging and so attentive and had seemed at the same time so modest and retiring that the merchant's son had found more pleasure in observing him than in listening to the talk of the other guests. Consequently he was all the more pleased when, many months later, this servant came up to him on the street, greeted him with the same deep earnestness as on that evening and, without any importunity, asked to take service with him. The merchant's son recognized him immediately by his dark, mulberry-colored face and by his great politeness.

He took him instantly into his service, discharging two young servants whom he still had, and henceforth had himself served at table and elsewhere only by this serious and reserved man. The man almost never made use of the permission to leave the house in the evening.

He showed an odd dependence on his master, whose wishes he anticipated and whose likes and dislikes he silently guessed, so that the latter was more and more pleased with him.

Though he had himself served at table only by this one man, the dishes of fruit and sweet cakes were carried in and out by a young serving girl, but two or three years older than the child. This girl, seen from a distance, or seen dancing by torchlight, would hardly pass for pretty, since thus all delicacy of feature is lost. When he saw her near him and every day, he was taken with the incomparable beauty of her eyelids and her lips, and the heavy, joyless movements of her lovely body were to him the riddling speech of a closed and wondrous world.

When the heat of the summer grew very great in the city and the dull heat crept along the houses, when in the sultry, heavy, moonlit nights, the wind raised white dust clouds in the empty streets, the merchant's son journeyed with his four servants into the hills to his country house in a narrow valley surrounded by dark mountains. There were many such country houses of the rich in the region. From both sides of the valley waterfalls dropped into ravines, cooling the air. The moon almost always remained behind the mountains, but great white clouds rose from behind the black walls, swept ceremoniously across the darkly gleaming sky, and disappeared on the other side. Here the merchant's son lived his accustomed life in a house whose wooden walls were continually stroked by the cool scent of the garden and of many waterfalls. In the afternoons, until the sun fell behind the mountains, he sat in his garden and read, for the most part in a book which sketched out the wars of a very great king of the forgotten past. Many times, in the midst of a description of how the thousand shrieking knights of a hostile king turned their horses or how they snatched their chariots from the steep shore of a stream, he had suddenly to pause, for he felt, without turning, that the eyes of his four servants were upon him. He knew, without lifting his head, that they were watching him, silently each from a different room. He knew them so well. He felt that they were living more strongly, more urgently, than himself. Concerning himself he felt at times a light stirring or wonderment; concerning these servants, however, a strange unease. He felt with the clarity of a nightmare how both of the old people strove against death, with the ceaseless light alteration of their features and figures which he knew so well; and how both girls were living a dreary and stifling life. Like the

terror and the death-like bitterness of a dreadful dream which disappears on waking, the heaviness of their lives, of which they themselves knew nothing, lay upon his limbs.

Many times he had to stand up and walk around in order not to yield to his fear. But while he stared at the shining gravel in front of his feet and strained every nerve to think only of how the scent of carnations came to him in whole gusts amid the cool scent of grass and earth and of the warm, flooding scent of heliotrope between, he felt their eyes and could think of nothing else. Without raising his head, he knew that the old woman was sitting at her window, her bloodless hands on the sun-warmed sill, her bloodless masklike face an ever-more-frightening frame for the helpless black eyes which could not die. Without raising his head, he sensed when the manservant left the window for a few minutes to rummage in a cupboard; without looking up he waited in secret fear for the moment when he should return. Even while, drawing light branches together behind him, he crept away into the most overgrown corner of the garden in order to force his thoughts to the beauty of the sky which filtered down upon him from above through the web of twigs and tendrils in tiny, shining pieces of damp turquoise, his whole blood and thought could tell him only that he felt the eyes of the two girls on him, those of the larger heavy and sad, with a vague questioning that tortured him, those of the smaller with an impatient and then again scornful attention which tortured him still more. And yet, he never thought that they were looking at him directly, at him as he walked about with bent head, or knelt by a carnation to bind it up with bast, or bent under the twigs, but it seemed to him as if they were watching his entire life, his deepest being, his secret human insufficiency.

A dreadful unease came over him, a deathly fear of the inescapability of life. More dreadful than they should secretly observe him was their forcing him to think of himself in so fruitless and so exhausting a fashion. And the garden was far too small for him to escape them. But when he was quite close to them, his fear quieted so fully that he almost forgot the past. Then he was able either not to look at them or quietly to watch their movements, movements so familiar to him that he felt a ceaseless, almost bodily sympathy with their lives.

The little girl met him only now and again on the steps or in the entrance. The three others, however, were often with him in the

same room. Once he caught a glimpse of the older girl in an inclined mirror. She was walking through a raised room to one side. In the mirror, however, she came to him out of the depths. She was walking slowly and with effort, but quite upright, carrying in each arm a heavy, slim Indian idol of dull bronze. She held the ornamented feet of the figures in her cupped hands. From her hips to her temples stretched the dark goddesses, leaning with a dead weight on the living delicate shoulders; but the dark heads with their evil snaky mouths, the three wild eyes in the forehead and the strange ornament in the cold, harsh hair moved beside the breathing cheeks and touched the lovely temples in time with the slow steps. Actually she seemed to walk heavily and ceremonially not because of the goddesses but because of the beauty of her own head with its heavy ornament of living dark gold, formed into two great arched curves at the side of a light star, like a queen of battles.

He was struck with her great beauty, but at the same time he knew clearly that it would mean nothing to him to hold her in his arms. He knew, moreover, that the beauty of this serving girl filled him with emotion but not with desire, so that he did not look at her long but went out of the room, out into the lane and walked further among the houses and gardens with a strange disquiet in the narrow shadows. Finally he went to the river bank where the gardeners and flower merchants dwelt, and searched, although he knew he would search in vain, for a flower whose shape and scent or for a root whose penetrating breath could give him for a quiet moment the same sweet charm which lay in the beauty of the serving-girl who had disquieted him. And while he vainly sought around with yearning eyes in the dark greenhouses and bent, in the open air, over the long flowerbeds in the gathering evening, his head repeated arbitrarily, yes, even torturedly and against his will, the verse of the poet, "In the stalk of the swinging carnation, in the scent of ripe grain, thou awakenest my longing; But when I found thee, thou wert not whom I sought, but the sister of thy soul."

II

One day there came a letter which disquieted him in a certain measure. In a cloudy fashion, the writer accused the manservant of having committed some sort of monstrous crime in the house of his previous master, the Persian Ambassador. The unknown writer seemed to hate the servant thoroughly and added many threats; even

toward the merchant's son himself, he used a rude, almost threatening tone. But it could not be guessed what the crime was or what purpose the letter could serve for the writer, who neither named himself nor asked for anything. The merchant's son read the letter several times, and realized that he hated the thought of losing his servant in such an unpleasant way. The more he thought it over, the more disturbed he became and the less he could bear the notion of losing one of these people to whom, through custom and other secret forces, he had grown close.

He walked up and down, his anger heating him so that he threw off his coat and mantle. He felt as if someone had attacked and threatened his most intimate possession and was trying to force him to fly from himself and to deny what was dear to him. He felt sorry for himself, and, as always in such moments, like a child. He imagined his four servants already torn from his house, and it seemed to him as if the whole content of his life were drawn from him, all the bittersweet memories, all the half-unconscious expectations, all the unspoken desires — thrown aside and disregarded, like a bundle of algae or seaweed. He understood for the first time what as a child he had always scorned, the anguished love with which his father clung to possessions, to the riches of his vaulted warehouses, the lovely lifeless children of his search and worry, the secret products of the vague and deepest wishes of his life. He understood that great king of the forgotten past, who could not have lived if he had lost those lands which he had traversed and conquered between the Western and the Eastern Seas, those lands which he had dreamed of ruling and which were yet so interminably vast that he could have no power over them and no tribute from them except the knowledge that he had conquered and that no one else was king.

He determined to take any pains to settle this worrisome matter. Without saying a word to his servant about the letter, he made ready and traveled alone into the city. There he decided first of all to visit the house of the Persian ambassador, for he had a vague hope of finding there some sort of clue.

However, when he reached the house, it was late afternoon and there was no one at home, neither the ambassador nor any of the young men of his train. Only the cook and an old scribe of low rank sat in the doorway in the cool twilight. But they were so ugly and gave such brief, churlish answers that he turned away impatiently, deciding to come back the next day at a better time.

Since his own house was shut up — for he had left no servant in the city — he had, like a stranger, to think of finding a lodging for the night. Curiously, like a stranger, he walked through familiar streets and came at last to the bank of a little stream, which at this time of the year was almost dry. From there, lost in thought, he followed a long poor street where many of the town prostitutes lived. Without paying much attention to his route, he turned right and came into a quite dreary, deathly still, blind alley, which ended in a steep flight of stairs about the height of a tower. He stopped on the stairs and looked back at the way he had come. He could see into the courts of the small houses; here and there were red curtains at the windows and ugly, dusty flowers; the broad, dry streambed was of a deadly sadness. He mounted higher and emerged in a quarter of the city he could not remember ever having seen. Nevertheless an intersection of mean streets seemed suddenly familiar, as if from a dream.

He walked along and came to a jeweler's shop, a very poor shop, such as served for this part of the city. The show-window was full of worthless trinkets, such as might have been gathered from pawn-brokers and receivers of stolen goods. The merchant's son, who knew a good deal about gems, could hardly discover a halfway decent stone in the lot.

Suddenly he noticed an old-fashioned trinket of thin gold, decorated with a beryl, which somehow reminded him of the old woman. Probably he had once seen her with such a trinket left over from the time when she had been a young woman. Also it seemed as if the pale, almost melancholy stone in an odd way suited her age and appearance, and the old-fashioned setting was of the same sadness. He went into the poor shop to buy the trinket. The jeweler was delighted to see so well-dressed a customer and wished to show him his better stones, which he had not put in the window. Out of politeness to the old man, the merchant's son let himself be shown a great many things, but he had no wish to purchase nor had he ever, in his solitary life, had a use for such presents. Finally he grew impatient, and at the same time embarrassed, for he wished to get away without giving offense. He decided to purchase one more trifle and then leave immediately.

Idly he observed over the shoulder of the jeweler a small hand-mirror which had lost half its silver. There came a reflection out of another mirror in the dark shop, the image of a young girl, with the dark heads of brazen goddesses on either side; swiftly he realized

that much of her charm lay in the delicate, childish grace with which her shoulders and neck supported her head, the head of a young queen. And swiftly he thought it would be pretty to see on this neck a thin gold chain, wound many times around, childlike and yet like armor. And he asked to see such a chain.

The old man opened a door and asked him to step into a second room, a mean dwelling-room, where a great many trinkets were laid out in glass cases and on open shelves. Here he soon found a chain he liked and asked the jeweler to name a price for both trinkets. The old man asked him to look further at some antique saddles whose mountings were set with semi-precious stones. He answered however that as a merchant's son he had never had anything to do with horses, did not even understand how to ride, and took no pleasure in saddles, either new or old. He paid for what he had bought with a gold piece and some silver coins and showed some impatience to leave the shop.

While the old man, without another word, drew out a fine tissue paper and wrapped the chain and the beryl trinket each separately, the merchant's son chanced to walk over to the single, poor grilled window and looked out. He saw a very well-kept vegetable garden quite obviously belonging to the next house and closed in at the back with two greenhouses and a high wall. Immediately, he wished to see these greenhouses and asked the jeweler whether he could show him the way. The jeweler handed him his two little parcels and led him through an adjoining room into the court, which communicated with the garden by means of a small grilled gate. Here the jeweler stopped and knocked with an iron knocker. Since the garden remained quiet and no one stirred in the neighbor's house, the jeweler asked the merchant's son to look quietly through the greenhouses and, if questioned, to refer the questioner to him, who knew the owner very well. Then he opened the door by reaching through the grill.

The merchant's son walked immediately along the wall to the closer greenhouse, stepped in, and found such a wealth of unusual and fine narcissi and anemones and so many plants he had never seen before that for a long time he could not see enough. Finally he looked up and realized that the sun had gone down behind the houses without his having been aware of it. Since he did not wish to linger in a strange, unwatched garden, he decided only to glance from outside through the panes of the second green-house and then to go away. While he was walking along, looking through the panes of the second green-house, he was suddenly startled and sprang back. For a man's face

next the glass was looking out at him. After a second he calmed himself and saw that it was a little girl, not more than fourteen, whose white dress and pale face were pressed against the pane. But when he looked close again, he felt frightened, with an uneasy shuddering in his neck and a soft tightening in his throat and deeper in his chest. For the child, who was looking motionlessly and evilly at him, resembled indefinitely the fifteen-year-old serving girl he had left at home. Everything was the same, the light eyebrows, the fine, trembling nostrils, the thin lips; like the other one, this child too carried one shoulder a little higher than the other. Everything was the same, except that this child gave him a single impression of horror. He had no idea why he felt this nameless fear. He was sure only that he could not bear to turn away, knowing that this face was staring through the glass behind him.

In his fear he walked very quickly to the door of the greenhouse, but the door was shut, bolted from outside. Hastily he stooped to the bolt, which was very low, pulled it back so strongly that he tore a joint of his little finger painfully, and walked, almost running, toward the child. The child came toward him, and without saying a word, pressed against his knees and tried with her weak little hands to force her way past. He had difficulty to keep from stepping on her. But his fear grew less as he came close to her. He bent over the child's face, which was quite pale and in which the eyes trembled with anger and hate, while the small teeth of her lower jaw bit with unconcealed wrath into her upper lip. His fear disappeared for a moment, as he stroked the girl's fine, soft hair. But suddenly he recalled the little girl at home and the hair which he had once touched as she lay, deathly pale and with closed eyes in her bed, and suddenly a shiver ran down his spine again and his hands drew back.

She had given up trying to press past him. She retreated a few steps and looked straight in front of her. It was almost unbearable to him, this doll-like body in its little white dress and the scornful, shuddering, pale little face. He was so filled with horror that a kind of stitch began to work in his temples and throat, when his hand touched something cold in his pocket. It was a couple of silver coins. He took them out, stooped over the child again, and gave them to her, because they shone and rattled. She took them and let them fall at her feet, so that they rolled away between the loose boards of the floor. Then, turning, she walked slowly away. For a little he stood motionless, his heart beating wildly lest she should come back and look in at him through the glass. Now the light was no

longer clear in the greenhouse, and the shapes of the plants began to seem strange. At a little distance insanely threatening branches rose out of the twilight, and on beyond there was a white shimmer, as if the child were standing there. In a row on a board stood earthen pots of wax flowers. As a distraction, he counted the blossoms, which were too stiff for living flowers and had something like masks, evilly malicious masks with eye-sockets grown shut. When he had finished he went to the door and tried it.

The door would not open; the child had bolted it from outside. He wanted to scream, but was afraid of his own voice. He beat with his fists on the panes of glass. The garden and the house remained deathly still. Only, something glided behind him, rustling through the branches. He knew that it was leaves, shaken off and dropping through the heavy air. Nevertheless he controlled the beating of his heart, and stared through the twilight stirring of the trees and limbs. There, in the darkening back wall, he made out a crossing of dark lines. He crept over, now quite regardless of the earthen flower pots and the high thin stems and the rustling foliage fanning out above him and stirring like a ghost behind him. The crossing of dark lines was the outline of a door, which yielded to pressure. Fresh air crossed his face; behind him he could hear the bent stems and pressed-down leaves raising themselves lightly as if after a storm.

He stood in a small, walled-in walk. Above was the open sky, and the walls on both sides were hardly higher than a man. But the walk was walled once more after a distance of about fifteen paces, and he felt himself already trapped. Uncertainly he stepped forward; the wall on the right had an opening the width of a man, and from the opening a plank ran over empty space to a platform on the other side. This platform was closed in on the near side by a low iron grill; the other two sides were closed in by high houses. There, where the board rested like an entrance bridge on the edge of the platform, was a little gate in the grill.

So great was the impatience of the merchant's son to escape his fear that he put first one foot and then the other on the plank and, his gaze fixed on the opposite shore, began to cross over. But unluckily he became aware that he was hanging in space over the heavy rubbish of an old walled drainage ditch. Through his soles and knees went a horror and helplessness, a dizziness through his entire body, the closeness of death. He knelt again and closed his eyes; groping forwards, he could just touch the grillwork. He grasped it hard; it yielded; and with a soft creak, which went through his body

like the sigh of death, the door to which he was clinging opened outward, toward the abyss, toward him. Utterly tired and discouraged, he felt the smooth rounds of iron slip from his fingers, which seemed now like the fingers of a child, and he fell crashing, along the wall. But the quiet opening of the door held him before his foot lost the plank, and with a single thrust, he hurled his trembling body through the opening onto the solid ground.

He could not rejoice. Without looking around him, with a dull sensation like hate against the senselessness of these tortures, he entered one of the houses, went down a neglected stair, and stepped out again into an ugly and familiar alley. But he was already so sad and tired that he could think of nothing which would make him happy. In a strange way, everything had fallen away from him, and, quite empty and lifeless, he traversed this alley and the next and the next. He walked in the general direction which he knew should bring him out in the rich quarter of the city where he could look for a lodging for the night. For he longed now for a bed. Childishly, he remembered the pleasure of his own broad bed, and of the beds which the great king of the forgotten past had had set up for himself and his companions when they married the daughters of conquered kings, — for the great king a bed of gold, for the others, beds of silver borne on the backs of griffins and winged bulls.

In the meantime he had come to the mean quarters where the soldiers lived. He paid no attention. At a barred window sat a couple of soldiers with yellowish faces and called something to him. Then he raised his head and smelled the heavy odor which came out of the room, a quite unusually oppressive odor. However he did not understand what they wanted. But because they had roused him from his absent-minded progress, he turned and looked into the court as he passed the door. The court was very large and dismal and, because it was dark, seemed even larger and more dismal. Also there were very few men in it, and the surrounding houses were mean and dirty yellow. This made it still more deserted and larger. In one place about twenty horses were tethered in a line. By each of them a soldier knelt in a stable-coat of dirty ticking, and washed the hooves. At a distance many others were coming out of a door in pairs, in similar coats of ticking. They walked slowly, shufflingly, and carried heavy sacks on their shoulders. Only when they came closer could the merchant's son see that there was bread in the open sacks which they bore along silently. He watched them disappear slowly into a doorway and saw that they crept away under an ugly, hateful load,

carrying their bread in the same sort of sacking which clothed the sadness of their bodies.

Then he walked over to those who were kneeling by the horses and washing hooves. These also looked like one another and like those at the window and like those who had carried the bread. They must all have come from neighboring villages. These too spoke hardly a word to each other. Since it was very difficult for them to hold the forefeet of the horses, their heads shook, and their tired yellowish faces rose and fell as in a heavy wind. The heads of most of the horses were ugly and had an evil expression from the laid-back ears and drawn-back upper lips, which laid bare the eye-teeth. Most of them also had evil, rolling eyes and a strange way of blowing air scornfully and impatiently out of their pinched nostrils. The last horse in the line was especially strong and ugly. He was trying with his great teeth to bite the shoulder of the man who knelt before him and rubbed his hoof dry. This man had such hollow cheeks and so sad an expression in his tired eyes that the merchant's son was overcome with a deep and bitter sympathy. He wished to cheer up the suffering man for even a moment with some gift, and felt in his pocket for coins. He found none and remembered that he had tried to give the last of them to the child in the greenhouse, the child who had scattered them at his feet with so evil a look. He tried to look for his gold pieces, for he had brought along seven or eight for the journey.

At that moment the horse turned his head and looked at him with his evilly laid-back ears and rolling eyes, which looked more evil and wild because of the scar which ran back across the ugly head just at the height of the eyes. As the ugly gaze met his, he recalled suddenly a long-forgotten human face. He was so tired that he could not call back the features of the man, but nevertheless they were there. The memory, however, with which the face came was not so clear. He knew only that it came from his twelfth year, from a time with which there was connected somehow or the other the memory of the odor of sweet, warm, peeled almonds.

And he knew that the distorted face was that of an ugly, poor man whom he had seen a single time in his father's warehouse. And that the face was distorted with a fear of the threats people were uttering because he had a great gold piece and wouldn't tell where he had gotten it.

While the face was already vanishing, his fingers still hunted in the folds of his clothing, and as a sudden vague thought startled him,

he drew his hand out so carelessly that the little tissue-paper package with the beryl trinket fell under the horse's feet. He bent over; the horse kicked him in the loins with all his strength; and he fell on his back. He groaned aloud; his knees drew up; and his heels kept beating on the ground. A couple of soldiers rose and picked him up by the shoulders and the knees. He smelled the stench of their clothes, the same ugly, disquieting stench which had come out of the room into the street and he tried to think where, a long, long time ago, he had smelled it before; then he fainted. They carried him up a few stairs, through a long, half-dark passage into one of their rooms, and put him down on a low iron bed. Then they looked through his clothes, took the chain and the seven gold pieces, and finally, out of pity for his constant groaning, went to get a doctor.

After a time he opened his eyes and was conscious of torturing pain. But it frightened and worried him still more to be alone in this disquieting room. Tiredly he turned his eyes in their burning sockets toward the wall, and saw on a board three loaves of the sort of bread he had seen carried across the court.

There was nothing else in the room but low, hard beds and the smell of the dry reeds with which the beds were filled, and that other disquieting, heavy smell.

For a while he was occupied only with his pain and the thrusting fear of death, which was like the pain of lightning. Then he could forget his fear for a moment and think of how all this had happened.

Then he felt another fear, pricking, less pressing, a fear which was not new but which he had now overcome. And he clenched his fists and cursed his servant, who had driven him out to death; the man in the city; the old man in the jewelry shop; the young girl in the dark of the shop; and the child with its malicious figure there in the greenhouse, from whence he saw himself tumble over horrible stairs and bridges and down under the hoof of a horse. Then he fell back in great, heavy fear, whimpering like a child, not from pain but from sorrow, and his teeth clashed together.

Bitterly he stared back across his life and denied everything which had been dear to him. He hated his early death so much that he hated the life which had led him to it. This inner wildness exhausted his last strength. He fainted, and for a while slept again, a restless, rotten sleep. Then he woke and tried to scream because he was still alone, but his voice refused. At last he vomited gall, then blood,—and died with twisted features, his lips so torn that his teeth and gums lay bare and gave him a strange, evil expression.

JOHN ARTHOS:

Ritual and Humor in the Writing of William Faulkner

Faulkner seems to think of writing as a kind of consecration. And he seems to consider the characters in his stories as if they were performing a ritual, enthralled by the same sense of dedication as his own. The writer in relating the ritual is taking part in it, in a religious effort to justify the sense of consecration.

Given such an attitude, the narrative itself ought to be the sufficiently pure embodiment of things as they are, of truth. But Faulkner's intense belief in the value of dedication forcing him into lyricism also forces him to comment on the story. Just as the sophisticated readers of myths require allegorical explanations that were once, we suppose, unneeded, so Faulkner is driven to interpret the stories his characters enact. It is not enough merely to describe the performance of the ritual. The mystery itself must be divulged — divulged and exhausted in the revelation of the narrator's own interests and feelings. The story-teller gives in to the romantic poet, and we are asked to attend not only the action of the story but the way it appeared to the actors in it, of whom their creator is one. We see not merely men and women, but men and women who sense that they are symbols, and in their midst the character of the author himself, their observer and companion. All come to be described as ghosts, demonic animals, children of the passionate parentage of sun and earth, and as the writer's brothers and sisters.

In *Mosquitoes*, Faulkner's second novel, one of the characters is talking about literature:

"Genius." He spoke slowly, distinctly, staring into the sky. "People confuse it so, you see. They have got it now to where it signifies only an active state of the mind in which a picture is painted or a poem is written. When it is not that at all. It is that Passion Week of the heart, that first instant of timeless beatitude which some never know, which some, I suppose, gain at will, which others gain through an outside agency like alcohol, like to-night — that passive state of the heart with which the mind, the brain, has nothing to do at all, in which the hackneyed accidents which make up this

world — love and life and death and sex and sorrow — brought together by chance in perfect proportions, take on a kind of splendid and timeless beauty. Like Yseult of the White Hands and her Tristan with that clean, highhearted dullness of his; like that young Lady Something that some government executed, asking permission and touching with a kind of sober wonder the edge of the knife that was to cut her head off; like a redhaired girl, an idiot, turning in a white dress beneath a wistaria covered trellis on a late sunny afternoon in May."

The rest of his writing is proof enough that this is an expression of Faulkner's own belief, even the cardinal article. And the idea of dedication is not merely the controlling idea of an artist. It is the principle that governs all human beings who wish to mature. In understanding and obeying this principle one grows to decency and manhood. But in order to understand and obey, one must relate oneself to the past. One does so by means of rituals.

In one of Faulkner's latest stories ("The Bear") we find a boy growing up in the South, living excitedly for those times when he goes hunting with his elders, and with the great Negro-Indian hunter, Sam Fathers. Everyone knows that through proper conduct in hunting the boy will become a man.

There are various preliminary trials before the boy meets the bear, the ultimate prize, and these preliminary trials are the means of assimilating a mysterious quality. In one of the trials (in the story called "Delta Autumn") a buck is the boy's antagonist and his measure. When the boy kills the buck, Sam Fathers dips his hands in the animal's blood, and marks the boy's face in order to signify what the boy felt but was himself unable to express: "I slew you; my bearing must not shame your quitting life. My conduct forever onward must become your death." The animal is sacred, the hunt is a ritual, the hunter is consecrated.

In the crucial time when the boy finds the bear, and is aiming to shoot, he lowers his gun. He saw or sensed something that prevented his killing the bear. And this, we are given to understand, was proper: he ought not to have killed him. His cousin, who is one of the hunting party, explains to the boy that the bear represented something eternal, something the boy instinctively understood he could not harm, something he needed only to see and remember. In explaining this to the boy he recalls what he says is the meaning of the "Ode on a Grecian Urn": "Courage and honor and pride, and pity and love of justice and of liberty. They all touch the heart, and what the heart holds to

becomes truth, as far as we know truth." The boy has seen a vision, and visions are not to be touched.

These two ideas — of life consecrated by the blood of the nobly slain, and of the holiness of the heart's affections — may be regarded as amplifications of the remark in *Mosquitoes*, that genius is the Passion Week of the heart. They are the ideas in which the figures and devices of almost all Faulkner's writing is conceived.

In another story ("The Fire and the Hearth") the idea of chastity belongs to the same conception. Hunting, killing, blood baptism, and the rest are the necessary ceremonies through which "a young boy's high and selfless innocence" is transformed into the manliness of such people as Sam Fathers and Major de Spain. Here, innocence (which means, I think, selfless devotion and the disinterested imagination) is inducted into the violence of life and transformed into something which is also admirable. Sam Fathers represents the strength and enduringness of the primeval American continent, persistent in all the generations of men, and Major de Spain is the father of a civilized family. The boy is joining their company.

And so it is with Faulkner in the life of his imagination, always himself a character in his stories, always ceremoniously preparing himself for a life among men, and especially the god-like and legendary figures who belong to the history of the South. This sense of a holy process linking him to history seems always to return to its initial impulse, the reader enthralled by the poem on the Grecian urn. However deeply Faulkner searches the life of the South for the characters that will support his imagination, the charity or passion in which he conceives of them is always determined by the perceptions and ideas fostered by reading Keats. In a note printed in 1925 Faulkner wrote:

I read "Thou still unravished bride of quietness" and found a still water withal strong and potent, quiet with its own strength, and satisfying as bread. That beautiful awareness, so sure of its own power that it is not necessary to create the illusion of force by frenzy and motion. Take the odes to a Nightingale, to a Grecian urn, "Music to hear," etc.; here is the spiritual beauty which the moderns strive vainly for with trickery, and yet beneath it one knows are entrails, masculinity.

The Passion Week ends in peace, peace which now and then survives the hackneyed accidents of the world. History, which is the sum of so many accidents, is the source of our strength and the substance of our holy passion. It is what has been and what is, it is the record nature itself has made, once alive and still generating itself within us, and

through history, or nature (there is little difference), we are linked to death as well as to life.

Whatever may have absorbed Keats in his effort to achieve serenity, for Faulkner the chief preoccupation was violence. This preoccupation appears to rise in part from his experience and interest in the first World War; but his interest in the issues of that war soon merged with his thinking about the South. His home country had been living with the effects of violence for nearly three quarters of a century, and the ravishment was continuing into his own life-time. Injuries so deep bring pain that cries for a divine explanation. As Faulkner says again and again, the survivors think of themselves as ghosts, the living wreckage of a perennially violated world. As with ghosts their suffering is rigidly controlled, and the pattern of their lives is like a ritual because each movement is determined by the germinal pain of the past. The ritual means that there is no justification for pain and death, and yet that each man needs to dedicate his life before he meets with the inevitable violation.

Soldier's Pay, Faulkner's first novel, is about a young lieutenant who was shot down in France in the first World War. He is blind and seems to have nothing in his mind but the pain of some uncertain need. Casual acquaintances, a young war widow and a discharged sergeant, take charge of him on the train, and they continue to care for him at the house of his father. The young widow stays on in order to will herself into a state of fidelity; she reproaches herself for not missing her husband of so brief a period, and she hopes to gain some stability in life by devotedly serving this nearly unconscious man. By his very unconsciousness he is a symbol for her of a marriage that never had time to become part of her living, and a symbol of the object of any love. She needs to be faithful to it.

In this novel Faulkner hit upon the great image that was to dominate so many of his stories, the voiceless pain of an idiot. Elsewhere it takes the form of babbling, of the desire to murder, of self-torment, but always some form of a mind disarranged by pain and terribly unable to find the words that justify pain. The past had loosed its forces, and the lieutenant, who had once given himself to a cause, is now an inarticulate actor in a story signifying nothing.

From contemplating the results of violence upon the mind of one individual, as in this story, Faulkner went on to consider its results in the conflicts of races and social classes, in rivers flooding valleys and breaking jails, and in animals. The violence of war was merely an

event in the normal violence of the world, the world understood as history. After the first novels, his stories turn mostly towards the past, towards the Civil War, towards the Indians, and even towards Africa. In his own community of the South this history still lived and still continued to destroy. And in the stories of the people there, the living captives of the past, Faulkner was determined to discover if some saving meaning could be found. Writing about the South, he was dedicated, as Sartre finely expressed it, to "*cette foi, mi-sincère mi-rêvée, dans le pouvoir magique des histoires.*"

And yet in *Soldier's Pay*, alongside this intense preoccupation, there are passages of a most delightfully humorous kind, and the plot itself has a wry quality. Even at the beginning Faulkner exploited some of the humorous implications of his zeal. The humor was something to be cherished. In an essay published in 1926 he wrote:

We have one priceless universal trait, we Americans. That trait is our humor. What a pity it is that it is not more prevalent in our art. This characteristic alone, being national and indigenous, could, by concentrating our emotional forces inward upon themselves, do for us what England's insularity did for English art during the reign of Elizabeth. One trouble with us American artists is that we take our art and ourselves too seriously. And perhaps seeing ourselves in the eyes of our fellow artists, will enable those who have strayed to establish anew a sound contact with the fountainhead of our American life.

It is difficult to preserve humor when the writer considers his work a kind of Passion Week. The strain of inventing rituals and the peculiarly modern difficulties in the way of consecration obscure the perceptions which need to be so finely adjusted in comedy. But to obscure humor is not to kill it, and in much of Faulkner's writing one sees the continuing struggle for comedy. In *The Wild Palms* (where one story is a joke about a convict who returns to jail in order to escape a woman) the humor almost controlled the troubled excitement that elsewhere supports his romanticism. Only in *The Hamlet*, I think, in the characterization of Ratliff and in the incident of the toy cow, do comedy and its lovely reasoning win out.

The curious conflict is apparent in such an elaborately serious work as *The Sound and the Fury*. The story is told in sections presenting the thoughts of four people at certain times over a period of years, when they are thinking mostly about the events of one day, and the effect of that day upon their lives. The central subject of their thought is the seduction of a young girl and its consequences, but the chief

interest of the book lies in the description of her brother's attitude towards the catastrophe. He is extremely fond of her, and her situation thrusts upon him a burden of responsibility he accepts as a man who has been brought up in pride of family and delicacy of character. He comes to believe that his own love has failed her, and in something like adolescent self-torment he thinks his guilt is equivalent to the betrayal itself. He extends his torment to the point where it is as if he himself had betrayed her through incest. This straining for guilt places such a burden upon his consciousness that he is unequal to it, and finally he kills himself.

The problem appears ridiculous (the comic writer turning in his sleep), but it is not intrinsically so. If the brother's concern is justified, as it certainly is, we are tempted to mock him because he is only flirting with despair. As his father tells him (they have been talking of death): "you seem to regard it merely as an experience that will whiten your hair overnight so to speak without altering your appearance at all." The brother tries to understand what sin is, but he cannot; and yet he thinks he must assume his sister's guilt. His confusion drives him mad. He wants to believe in original sin, he wants to make himself into a symbol of it, and he finds himself unable to through some defect of insight and understanding. Accordingly, the plot of the novel is resolved through an explicit demonstration of the meaninglessness of an historic doctrine. A generous man, dedicated to something without meaning, finds his end in absurdity and madness. The absurdity is obvious, but not obvious enough to be presented comically. The author's sympathy prevents the detachment necessary for comedy, and even the meaning of the calamity is blurred. No meaningful comment is offered to present a larger view than Quentin Compson's own, no more than is found in a poem called "Visions in Spring," where the author speaks of himself as one

who toiled through corridors of harsh laughter,
Who sought for light in dark reserves of pain . . .

On the other hand, the idiot brother, Benjy, the most vivid character in the book, achieves symbolic significance. His mind is like a shattered mirror, and he understands very little of what goes on about him. But the fragments of his mind reflect everything, not merely a single evil, and everything that he sees is transformed, as it were, purely and without distortion, into a continuous moan. Benjy is the embodiment of disintegration, the mind shattered by the pain of evil, and Faulkner implies that the sound he makes is the music of the spheres.

As such its disharmony is the mingling of the cries rising into the minds of all the characters in the story and in the world. Evil is thus represented as the world's invasion of the individual soul, where once it was merely a bullet, fired at some time in the past, and still wounding a lieutenant.

The painful mind of this idiot is Faulkner's first sustained effort to create a single symbolic figure to represent the minds of all people whose ideals and lives have been violated. The lives of the two brothers seem to show that sin cannot be a symbol in Faulkner's world, and that only evil, in its meaninglessness, can provide a satisfactory image.

In *Soldier's Pay* and in *The Sound and the Fury* the initial evil is an event in the past, and the author treats the story through what we might call an historical method, and the past itself becomes increasingly the very substance of his thought. So, here and there in all his books Faulkner picked up the subject he first emphasized in *Sartoris*, the condition of the ravaged South, the remainder of a civilization living in the memory of "the wild bugles and the clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves." The thoughtful educated men and women — like Horace Benbow in *Sanctuary*, Miss Jenny in *Sartoris*, and many another — are living in the past. It was with them as with the central figure of *Absalom, Absalom!* — "Quentin Compson preparing for Harvard in the South, the deep South dead since 1865 and peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts, listening, having to listen . . . the Quentin Compson who was still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost, but nevertheless having to be one for all that, since he was born and bred in the deep South . . ." To whatever degree this is the condition of the South, ghosts became a preoccupation of Faulkner's, if we take ghosts to be what haunt the mind and memory with vague and inescapable compulsions, representing the power of the past and the dead over the living. The references are innumerable and the conception clear. "In the wide, empty, shadow-brooded street he looked like a phantom, a spirit, strayed out of its own world, and lost." "He sees himself a shadowy figure among shadows . . ." (*Light in August*). "Not only a man never outlives his father but not even his friends and acquaintances do" (*Absalom, Absalom!*). "And as he talked about those old times and those dead and vanished men of another race [the Indians] from either that the boy knew, gradually to the boy those old times would cease to be old times and would become a part of the boy's present, not only as if they had happened yesterday but as

if they were still happening, the men who walked through them actually walking in breath and air and casting an actual shadow on the earth they had not quitted" (*Go Down, Moses*). The lieutenant in *Soldier's Pay* is half-ghost, and the central figure of *Pylon* at least that.

This idea, we must believe, is natural to any defeated nation, but it is not necessarily important to all Southerners writing about the South. In Faulkner it is important partly because he thinks of himself as a lyrical recorder present in each scene he describes. In *Mosquitoes* he once introduced himself among his characters by a name similar to his own (the humor is crude), but by means of his personal style he introduced himself in the later books as a kind of presence. The sense of his own brooding mind as a person on the scene is intensified elsewhere in the stories carried along by the recording of the stream of consciousness. For all his magnificent skill in presenting the thoughts of various minds, his sympathy with what he describes creates another character, his own, for he is attempting to identify his needs and the needs of all his people. In what I take to be his own essay in a recent issue of *Furioso*, he calls himself a "ghost writer."

Ghosts are important to him because they are that which is on the way to being completely destroyed and are ready to join the past. Their value is further strengthened by Faulkner's occasional determinism. As Malraux saw it, "*il y a un Destin dressé, unique, derrière tous ces êtres différents et semblables, comme la mort derrière une salle d'incurables.*" Just as in *Sanctuary* we recognize the pessimism, the sense of the irremediable in Faulkner's acceptance of individuals as the symptoms of disease in society, in all his works except *As I Lay Dying* and *The Hamlet* we learn how men are inextricably controlled by the past, the charmed circle: "I have never got outside that circle. I have never broken out of the ring of what I have already done and cannot ever undo . . ." It is the necessary condition of ghosts to be bound by the laws of hell, or, as Faulkner would have it, by the prolific evil of the past.

In *Light in August* Faulkner made his most ambitious effort to raise questions about the meaning of a life controlled by pain, tracing one individual's life to its farthest origins in history, in Judea and in Africa. The central character is a man, Joe Christmas, who comes to believe he has Negro blood. In his pride, and while he is doubtful of his origin, he refuses to pass as a white man. He murders his benefactress because his pride cannot endure her pity, but he discovers that the added burden of that crime, even when he thinks of it as a sin, does

not entitle him to the depth of pain the knowledge of his birth has brought him. Even the threat of damnation cannot move him to humility, to a state of mind in which he can bring himself to ask for relief. He needs some myth to explain his situation, and to liberate him from his torment. And the characters in the story, who are variously pursuing or protecting him, are involved in the same search for a clarifying myth. A lawyer in the community summarized what was in the minds of all the characters:

"But there was too much running with him, stride for stride with him. Not pursuers: but himself: years, acts, deeds, omitted and committed, keeping pace with him, stride for stride, breath for breath, thud for thud of the heart, using a single heart. It was not alone all those thirty years which she did not know, but all those successions of thirty years before that which had put that stain either on his white blood or his black blood, whichever you will, and which killed him. But he must have run with believing for a while; anyway, with hope. But his blood would not be quiet, let him save it. It would not be either one or the other and let his body save itself. Because the black blood drove him first to the negro cabin. And then the white blood drove him out of there, as it was the black blood which snatched up the pistol and the white blood which would not let him fire it. And it was the white blood which sent him to the minister, which rising in him for the last and final time, sent him against all reason and all reality, into the embrace of a chimera, a blind faith in something read in a printed Book. Then I believe that the white blood deserted him for the moment. Just a second, a flicker, allowing the black to rise in its final moment and make him turn upon that on which he had postulated his hope of salvation. It was the black blood which swept him by his own desire beyond the aid of any man, swept him up into that ecstasy out of a black jungle where life has already ceased before the heart stops and death is desire and fulfillment. And then the black blood failed him again, as it must have in crises all his life. He did not kill the minister. He merely struck him with the pistol and ran on and crouched behind the table and defied the black blood for the last time, as he had been defying it for thirty years. He crouched behind that overturned table and let them shoot him to death, with that loaded and unfired pistol in his hand."

The point is that Faulkner knows of no way in which a civilized mind can accept any myths, of race, or sin, or salvation, that will justify this half-breed's confusion. Joe Christmas can only welcome destruction, overcome in life by a world the author conceives to be controlled by demons, all the hackneyed accidents rising out of the centuries to deprive him of peace. History made him run and made

the others pursue him, and Joe Christmas, caught in the flight as in some formal intoxication, hoped still to propitiate the past, to find his father, Christ, who long ago gave him his name and his hopes.

Along with this deeply serious story there is another interwoven, and in this one humor has its chance. A young, ignorant country girl, who has been seduced, starts out alone from her home in Alabama to find the father of the baby she is soon to have. She has the inexorable strength of the people in *As I Lay Dying*. Her apparently senseless journey, on foot, sometimes picked up on wagons, ignorant of her destination, and meanwhile growing heavier in her pregnancy, is first of all heroic, and finally comic. Somewhere on her journey an older man falls in love with her, and his affection is full of the sense of her worthiness. At the end of the book he is accompanying her to Tennessee, and a man who has given them a ride in his truck sees that she has just been taken up with the joy of travelling. She had forgotten all about her misery.

Two strange pilgrimages are thus contrasted: Joe Christmas seeks salvation and finds death; the ignorant little girl seeks justice and finds pleasure. It is her story that begins and ends the book, but the comic contrast fails. Faulkner was not quite prepared to view the search for salvation humorously.

In these stories it is possible to see a certain development in Faulkner's ideas. In all there were the usual assumptions: we are the products of the past, and as the defeated survivors of a war we are oppressed by memories of a struggle that is still costing us our assurance. Since we are thus cursed, we need to understand the cause for this evil being let loose among us, there must have been some initial evil, some original deviation from our nature.

As Faulkner approaches the idea of original sin, progressing beyond the conception of universal evil, he becomes vague. He has no philosophy to support his imagination in conceiving of incest as the symbol of the original evil. Remaining true to his imagination he had no recourse but to deal with imagined incest. The cry of protest that comes from Quentin and the others rises when they cannot find the cause of evil. And Faulkner seems to be conscious that, in the absence of theology, he has been constructing a pseudo-demonology. He has exploited the myths of a romantic anthropology and of aristocracy, dreams in the blood, racial memory, and all the seductive paraphernalia waiting for the man who believes that the meaning of life is to be found in suffering, and yet one who is still committed to thinking of life as a form of dedication.

There is an impasse, then, an intolerable one, and the only resolution or escape that Faulkner knew was to be found in something like comedy, that humor that has always kept him company. Once or twice, I think, in his long work, *The Hamlet*, he found a use for humor that exploited all his faculties and feelings, and the result was what I believe to be his most remarkable writing.

The Hamlet is a long novel describing the rise of the Snopes family to power in a small, rural community. The book falls into at least four separate stories, each primarily developed for its own sake. Though the characters are common to each, and the rise of an ignorant, avaricious family is the theme of the book, there is no real unity.

The great achievement of the work is the characterization of Ratliff, the sewing-machine salesman, shrewd, witty, disinterested, the civilized commentator on the progress to power of the ambitious and unworthy. He is all but free from the passions that enslave his community. For the first time Faulkner sets up a rational man as the central figure of a story. The gain is enormous, considering that the characters and pictures have lost neither intensity nor vividness. The picture of the stooped man in the blue cotton shirt, sitting on the porch of the store, whittling, seeing everything while appearing to see nothing, matching wits with all, is memorable to the point that it is exactly as if one saw him there. For art of this kind there can be no useful comment.

In the end, avarice infected Ratliff and made a fool of him, but as long as his reason is in command he is a great figure, and his worsting of the Snopes family in the first part of the book seems to me one of the best really comic stories in American literature.

In a long section of this work Faulkner treats a myth in a new way for him. This is the story of an idiot boy given to the pursuit of a cow. We see some of the workings of the idiot's mind, but we construct much of our idea of him from his acts and from what others say of him. The technique now is partly that of the stream of consciousness, and partly reportorial and objective. His family and the neighbors who know of his bestiality endeavor to prevent it, but they have no means of communicating their desires to his consciousness. Locking up is ineffectual. There is a particular cow the idiot is in love with: ". . . the bright thin horns of morning, of sun, would blow the mist away and reveal her, planted, blond, dew-pearled, standing in the parted water of the ford, blowing into the water the thick, warm, heavy, milk-laden breath. . . ." Finally someone gives the idiot a small toy cow, and his pursuit is ended. The metamorphosis of the

goddess into a toy seems to me a myth considered rationally, brilliantly explaining the nature of idiocy, and for the first time the symbol includes a fully satisfactory judgment. For the first time Faulkner achieved the balance between comedy and horror. For once the story spoke for itself, and the ghosts departed.

Most of Faulkner's work reveals some mythical pretension, though nowhere else are his myths treated wittily. And it is curious to observe that in the two novels which seem to be the best constructed (*As I Lay Dying* and *Sanctuary*) the mythical and religious interests are subdued and there is comparatively little emphasis upon history. The point I wish to make is that, though humor gives a remarkable grace to *The Hamlet*, the form of two of his works is strictly controlled by other attitudes, one by a kind of decent respect for people, the other by hatred. And yet in these, also, humor or comedy (I am not sure which) provides something significant and necessary.

As I Lay Dying is the story of the death and burial of Addy Bundren, wife of Anse Bundren, a poor white farmer, and the mother of his four children. The story is told through the reporting of streams of consciousness. The thoughts of each character are recorded in short chapters as the coffin is built before the mother dies, and as her family carry her to the burial place she has chosen, some miles away.

The subject of the novel is kinship. The people are "poor whites," with all the strength and tenacity that permit them to survive in spite of their pride and ignorance. Their unquestioning observance of the mother's request could only have been maintained by a primitive sense of blood-loyalty. The problems that face them are elementary — making a coffin, obtaining horses to draw the wagon, finding a place to cross the river when bridge after bridge has been washed out. No obstacle can prevent the burial, nor is there anything in their characters to weaken or even question their purpose. For them the burial according to the wish of the dead person is an enjoiner having all the authority of whatever has granted them existence in the first place. There is little thought of naming the authority — God or the church or honor — and it overrides inertia, family differences, and the protests of neighbors. It takes many days before the family is able to bury the mother as delay after delay holds up the wagon. Her body rots, and as the funeral party passes through villages the smell of the dead woman excites the inhabitants, and they complain of a menace to health. A bridge collapses, the mules drown, but all that nature or men can oppose is overcome.

The narrative increases steadily in interest and awe. The story is heroic. The passions that govern the characters are intensified by the absence of interests distracting to members of more self-conscious classes of society. The family relationships, the burial, the seduction of the daughter, are given the full range of human passion by people who have no other means of spending it.

Several incidents are ugly and bitter, but they are not meant to be merely horrible. They are incidents which appear to the participants simply as the commonplaces of existence, and to the extent that Faulkner makes this clear to us his treatment of them may be said to be that of a heroic joke. But these events are too fierce and tense to allow for humor; we understand that what might have been ridiculous is indeed serious because the absurd actors are human, and great. These men and women are struggling against a universe which opposes them with fire and floods, and against the limitations of their own natures, all in order to fulfill the obligations of kinship. The horror of the novel is that men and women are playing parts in a joke. But because they feel the need of loyalty so deeply, their story becomes decent.

Faulkner said that he wrote *Sanctuary* in order to revile a public that had been insensitive to the quality of his previous work. It was originally meant to be a shocker, though later Faulkner revised it to avoid, I suppose, the imputation of cheapness. But the conception of the book as a joke continued to control it in one important respect. It is the nature of a joke that it have a contemporary subject, viewed without historical perspective. It follows that ghosts can have no place in *Sanctuary*.

This is the story of an underworld in Memphis and the neighboring country, created by the favored as well as the depressed classes. The chief figure, Popeye, is the product of a criminal environment and poverty, and towards the end of the book he is rather prosaically treated as a case study. He may be considered to be congenitally deformed, though it is clear that Faulkner means us to recognize that a certain kind of corrupt society spawned, brought up, and favored him.

Temple Drake and her college friends were the spoiled children of a class of people with pretensions to superiority, a class that had become morally bankrupt through accepting the superficial standards of a suburban civilization. They understood neither social nor individual responsibility. Though Temple had been given the privileges of a lady and had been allowed the arrogance of a coquette by a so-

ciety still gasping after the aristocratic dream, she drifted easily into the underworld because her parents and her society had done nothing to make anything but thrills meaningful. Nor had her society, in contrast with that of the Bundrens, allowed her to preserve even the rudiments of passion. When Popeye carried her off, she accepted the gangster world as a satisfactory environment.

I believe that Wyndham Lewis's characterization of *Sanctuary* as a satire conceived in pessimism is only partly correct. The moral of the story is that when the immature and irresponsible have power they understand none of its uses except violence. The impotent Popeye, raping Temple by proxy, offers the bitterest of comments on the nature of violence. But as I understand it, satire is conceived more in indignation than in pessimism, and in this book the controlling impulse is still something else. Malraux's analysis seems to me more satisfactory:

C'est, soit d'une impuissance d'esclave pleinement ressentie . . . soit de l'absurde irrémédiable . . . que jaillit chez Faulkner l'exaltation tendue qui fait sa force, et c'est l'absurdité qui donne à ses personnages secondaires, presque comiques . . . une intensité comparable à celle de Chitchédine. Je ne dirai pas de Dickens; car, même autour de tels personnages, rôde le sentiment qui fait la valeur de l'oeuvre de Faulkner: la haine.

The phrase recurs, "presque comique." But just as respect transformed the horrible absurdities of *As I Lay Dying*, so hatred in *Sanctuary* ruthlessly vivifies the emptiness of the immoral. The hatred is the hatred of a man who sees a part of his society clearly, and that clarity, like objectivity, is almost comic. Viewed comically, there is no need to blame the evil in these characters upon the past.

It appears that the union of outrage and humor is not an easy one. It seems that if this holy zeal and this humor of Faulkner's were balanced differently, many of the long stories would have been better integrated in the form they seem to seek, a comic form. As it is, each long work, for the most part, is a mixture of fine or wild rhetoric and religiously passionate investigations into the meaning of things, together with the brightest kind of comic comment. The passionate seeker after truth is the dominant personality in every work. But occasionally the comic writer holds his ground, at one time to mock, at another to illuminate the story with something more like reason than religion. Then the horrible stories seem like jokes, or even like comedies. At such times, happily enough, the strained religion deviates into sense. And at times, as in *As I Lay Dying*, there is a balance where the writing is merely simply true.

J. RADCLIFFE SQUIRES:

Two American Monologues

Jonathan Edwards

By night our Mother England rises from
The mists. Her hands, the hands of Grendel's dam,
Drip Druid weeds across the threshold of
Our sleep, and, standing on the stairs, she ghosts
The whole, dark house. From her, our dreams retreat
To hillsides where in restless New World graves
The luminous worm detours the bone.

When snow
On these graves lies, we see the form of graves
As we might see the form of sin entombed
In marble — touchable, untouching. But,
When springtime's burning brambles hiss the snow,
The blackness of the grave then opens like
The eye behind the statue's eye, and there,
We see, as in a glass, the wicked hair
Still growing from the skull.

And that same Spring,
Which drains worm-winnowings from hill
To Hell, directs the lily's lance to rise
Like hair through earth's old rotting flesh.

I walked a dell where bearded shadows and
The lily merge. I heard the birds' songs grow
As dim as songs which break their wings within
My cage of ribs, and then — the lily seized
Me. "Drive deep, O Jonathan. Desire me,
And wilderness is yours — rank hills, wild grass,
And teeming skies — enough to cauterize
Desire, enough to burn the burning years."

I recoiled, and not a moment too soon.
Now I do not walk in dells. I say: Keep graves
As warnings on the brow of wilderness,

And when the house flutters, keep your dreams
 From wandering. Do not open the chest
 In the attic, which is filled with something,
 Either apples or Satan. You do not wish to know.

Mark Twain

A long time passes from the instant when
 The river boat departs with youth to when
 The aged man returns to find the boat still moored.

Somewhere I heard of an albino horse
 Which, like the whisper of a plague, careered
 The grasslands, bringing madness, flight, and death.
 I sensed a sissy hidden in that horse.
 I felt that — in the center of the heart
 And mountain — beauty, like a Sunday school,
 Humiliated men and turned them old.
 I followed liars west and told my lie.
 What can I say of this? We never dreamed,
 But guffawed in our sleep. We never loved,
 But whored the mariposa with a laugh.
 We found a silence and we left a joke.
 We found an order and left ordure, and then
 Bonanzas petered out and Cibola,
 Like tinkling Camelot, bestowed a goodbye grin.
 But we had forged a roaring Titan god.
 Beneath his profane axe, the forests fell,
 And in the thunder of the falling trees
 We heard, like the death of a dynasty,
 The names of Melville, Whitman, Emerson.
 We heard the names again in whispers when
 The leaves, with air between them and the root,
 Flexed back against the stem. Our god was drunk.

In after years the laughter cracked and broke.
 I scoffed at Leonardo, and my roughened hands
 Played catch-thread on the silk Olivia.
 And then mere bitterness, and the smell of death's
 White horse running in the streets of Cibola.

I think that when at last you dare to face
 The purity of death, you find the wan,
 Remembered innocence of childhood scenes:
 A blue jay bickers through Missouri hills,
 The hooting river boat, like Time, is moored
 Against the God-like Mississippi's ebb
 Which drags the raft and catfish south to New Orleans.
 And then the child — whose underwater corpse,
 Carp-eyed, and blue with fungi, bloated, soft,
 Has drifted time and time again, with limbs
 Like eels, and spilled across the sunken wreck —
 Breaks suddenly to surface, catches sun,
 The mould flakes off. He laughs and lives.
 You realize while you were growing old
 The child had fooled you with a ruse
 Of drowning. Hidden on an island, where
 He smiled, he straddled brown and naked legs
 In air to mount the tossing leaves. And when
 He shut his eyes, through brilliant noon
 A tunnel opened black and cold. This was
 The cave at Hannibal where death, both deaths,
 Were growing like a crystal, silently
 And perfectly. Together, at the end,
 You enter Hannibal's cave and touch the stone.

But a long time passes from the instant when
 The river boat departs with youth to when
 The aged man returns to find the boat still moored.
 God pity and forgive me for my time.

CARL BODE:

Lenten Season

The oily smell of life everlasting clings
 To all it touches.
 The black pool poured upon the sunken grave
 Gleams as it smudges.

Above the grave the tree-bound birds
 Are supposed to sing
 Instead of flying cursively away
 On blackened wing.

But warned by the odor of eternity
 They soon will go —
 Sensible, mechanical, they see that
 What is so is so.

Only man stays to survive, staring down
 At the oily pool,
 Never letting die
 Its dark, iridescent, dual
 Gilding by the sky.

Feast of Saint Jude the Apostle

Have you walked in the night with firm tread
 Only to step on the outstretched hand
 Of a friend lying sprawled on the wet sand,
 Slipped and almost fell beside her, but instead
 Recovered with a gasp; and down on the dead
 Turned a face wiped of all emotion and bland?
 Then, calm with relief, have you paused to stand
 And smile at tears that others will later shed?

I myself would have dropped to my knees
 And heaped up sand over her. I would have played
 The child, smoothing the mounds, slow, undismayed,
 Stopping to hear the warm benighted seas.
 I would at least, everyone understands,
 Have stooped to cross her bright and beatific hands.

AGNES W. MACDONALD:

Vacia

It was evening and Vacia Ellason, abashed as a slighted manikin, stood in her many-windowed sunroom and looked down over her community speculatively. Nobody had lights on. The day had been too warm. Without lights people could go around half clothed and on hot nights some people went to bed without lighting up at all. Little Bees, Vacia's nine-year-old daughter, was asleep already. And Herb, her husband, was still watering their big lawn. She was a believer that a neighborhood should have its quiet, but all was too silent, too indrawn tonight. Vacia thought with a sense of welcome of her new cleaning-woman coming tomorrow, a person from a distance to say things to, one who didn't know all her affairs. "Where ignorance is blest, its folly is too wise," she murmured with a consolatory inflection. Vacia had liked quoting, all her life, in her own way. "Coating" she called her habit.

She peered out east where the horizon was lowest, between the long white wooden religious meeting-house, which in an hour or so would let out light and interminable song, and the Fractions' house. Herb had said there would be a moon and she thought he said east. She looked for it to rise now, because she was expecting it, from behind that trailer that stuck up from the field like a young child's new front tooth and in the dimness seemed closer than it was to the Fractions' house. Mrs. Ellason needed light.

"The moon is my guardian angel," she had said to Herb at dinner when they had repeated the ordinary sayings about hot days and going unclothed in the cooling darkness.

He didn't show any curiosity, just said he'd sprinkle until the house was cooler. His favorite radio programs on Wednesday nights came late.

Herb was out in front now; so Vacia could not see or hear him. She gazed out each of the three south windows at the back of the Meeks' place across the alley. Silent; motionless; it might have been vacant as it was only a month ago. Not even the dog in the back yard. The dog had not been seen or heard since Monday. Yet the Meeks were not away. They surely wouldn't slip off anywhere this first summer.

Vacia knew her neighborhood, but these newcomers had got a start here while the Ellasons were gone for Herb's two weeks' fishing.

The Zaffs had moved away in May — the first people to make such a change in eleven years. But Vacia had not been sorry. Herb liked the Zaffs, called them independent; but she didn't. "Refectory — that's what they always were," she'd said to him when the rebels went. They were not like the Fractions, whose fault was endurable: they never ceased altering their house in some whimsical way, though they never made the one change Vacia would have liked; they never added a back door. She was often provoked but had grown used to the door on their east side which she could only hear. As if with faith that circulated flattery would at last give the little push into performance, she had often said, "A back door should be a knockout for a workman like Mr. Fraction's brother." Just now they were having a brick walk laid with brick to match their chimney. Bricks lay around anywhere, as if they had been taken up by children and then discarded. Just something more to trip over — for Mr. Fraction's brother; and Vacia felt a vague indebtedness to the man even though he was known to get drunk. He had given her the background of her neighbors and had pronounced the words that put her on the track to express some queer longing she'd had. He lived here with his brother and his wife, who ran a bar somewhere across the city which Herb said was decent and paid good. In her neighborhood life the Fractions were fairly negligible, they always came home so late.

When Vacia bought the house she lived in, only the Fractions, Zaffs, and Merdens — still snug, and orderly as a calendar, on her west — were established. She had watched every other place rise out of the ground, every house. The long white wooden church whose two high back windows looked steadily over the hedge-bordered alley at the side of Vacia's house had been established too; it stretched up along the avenue like some giant pullman car all whitewashed and ready for passengers heavenbound. She didn't really notice it until they were all moved in and she got the urge to fulfill herself. Herb hadn't wanted to move from their first place, but she had the money.

"You'd wait to be exploded out," she said to him in vague reference to some local disturbance around their other place. "I can't live like a variable prisoner."

So they came across miles to this upspringing section of the city where Herb knew a satisfaction he couldn't have explained.

Vacia had gone to see through the house alone before she took Herb.

"The man was so considerate of a person," she said, opening her report on the house.

"How big is the place?" Herb had asked.

"Oh, it's a good size, for three or more. The man knew just how to treat me."

"Did you have to say anything about —?"

"Of course not; but I could tell that he knew I was supersensitive."

"Why are they moving?"

"Well, he built the house for his wife and they've lived in it three years; but there's one room his wife's mother used and he was so nice and sober about it too the way he explained it. She was bed-riven a long time and kinda unbalanced at the last. She called the room her window in thumbs — I suppose after she got deranged. He said she could see the world from there."

Herb took time off from his office to go and have a look with Vacia, and then learned that she had made a payment; that made him act flip — mean, Vacia said — when they looked at the room with all the windows. He said it would be just the room for her.

It was so freezing cold the day they moved in that the windows were solidly opaque.

"We'll just consign it for storage until spring," said Vacia.

When spring came she said she kept feeling something inner about that room and insisted on having every window weather-stripped. The man Herb got to do the work was Mr. Fraction's brother. He was another swell kinda fellow, Vacia would say. He was chatty and every time she'd go in to see which window he was on he'd start in telling her all about the buildings and the people around. The day he said there was one drawback about the neighborhood she got into a common feeling with him. He said it was having that Church of the Stone-the-Builders-Rejected right there on their corner. He'd never been in the place, but it was in a long white wooden building something like this one, he said, where a man made him believe he could cure him of getting drunk and he did cure him for a while but the cure wore off — just like sunburn, he said, when your vacation is over. So he bore an eternal grudge against those kind of people who go there and moreso for the ones who set themselves up to do the curing. Right there Vacia discovered a bond with Mr. Fraction's brother, who was Mr. Fraction too, Mr. Joe Fraction, because her own father, so often misappreciated, never got along with those wooden church kind of people. And through the consequent confidence, she discovered the

function she had been groping after for this windowed room.

Mr. Fraction, referring to the habits of those wooden church kind of people, said, "Just you watch."

"Did you say Watch?"

He said, "Yes, I did."

"That's my name!" she said. "Vacia. It means *watch*."

"Does it?"

"It's consecrated — I mean I was. By some scripture verse— My mother and father chose it long before they separated, while my mother still had more money than my father. And my mother advised me to always keep a hold on the money; she gave my father too much to get started on — they didn't break up completely until my third year in college."

"That's how you know those kind of words," he said, "being to college."

"I suppose. I was to different colleges — three. My father didn't like the way the deans at the first two would write to him about me. For one thing they never wrote their names so he could read them when he wanted to write back. He said there was something the matter with that — something not ephical. My father took me out, but my mother maintained that changing colleges like that spoiled my getting a career."

Mr. Fraction knew the verse that explained her name and he began to repeat it, "Watch, for you know not—" and then Mrs. Ellason remembered the sound of it. And she devised a way to keep herself in mind of it, for she loved scripture verses and had her little girl enrolled in the vacation Bible school so that she would learn them too.

Vacia searched east again and then stretched out on a couch as if to wait for the moon. It was getting darker but she did not use lights up here and she never drew the costly drapes whose uselessness Herb jested about. She said the low chairs and the couch made her private and remote; he'd have closed up the place like a blind man he was so unsocial. Mr. Fraction's verse had inspired the character of the room, which required undrawn drapes. She could read her mottoes fastened to the frames between the windows. Herb did not like them either. They reminded him of the ones painted on rocks, disfiguring nature. But she said he drove too fast, that the mottoes were an aid to nature. She liked to think hers showed what she had always lived up to; she read each one in the dark as she pointed and tested herself: Watch and wait . . . Wait and do good . . . The meek shall —oh yes!

inherit the earth; she had to stop and think or she'd say *inhibit*. That one had been a favorite until she came over here to live, when the Watch one became her guide. But she had lately put up the Meek one and thought it a good move because she stumbled on that one word when she neglected it. She liked the word *meek*, the way it made her look when she said it studying herself in the mirror.

She heard voices; one was Herb's. She got up to look and watch. Herb was talking to the man from the trailer who was on his way across the field to the Rejected-Stone Church. She couldn't hear. That was the way with Herb; he'd talk like an equal with anybody.

The long white ark looked the same as it had for eleven years with its doors flung wide to the very street. She could see one door standing back like the cover of an open book. Vacia resented the place's anonymity; she wanted a definite preacher in residence next door. There was that big rectangular board somebody was always painting new verses and invitations on, but never the name of a single trustee or anybody a person could complain to if anything occurred, on account of all their meetings. Three nights a week and three times on Sunday they held meetings; but where their speakers resided outsiders could not tell. This summer was different, it seemed — if people could be said to reside in a trailer when they were in a community like this one. Vacia thought the congregation should have asked the residents in a newish section still building up like hers about receiving a trailer, even if they did own over to the next street. This fellow, this evangelist from the trailer, was some kind of healer too — he was advertised on the board up by the entrance. And the articles on a clothes line between oak trees spelled out that he had a wife and child . . . Surely the Fractions must be aggravated having the trailer so close, but she could see the field was more level there. The man had to carry water from the lawn-hose faucet in the side of the Rejected-Stone. And he always sang while he carried as if at those meetings he didn't get sung out. On Wednesday nights he conducted a healing meeting when he took attenders down to the basement and did his hocus-pocus. He'd be making ready for it now.

Last week when it was hot and Vacia was strolling around to avoid the heat she got up near the windows on the street side and saw him and nine or ten people and he was praying over a young boy. But she couldn't hear. Trucks kept going by. She didn't see how they stood the clatter. When she first came to the neighborhood, she had tried to do good and improve things for everybody including these elusive

worshippers. Once she did catch one of the preachers — an evangelist coming through the field. She came out of her garden and motioned to him.

"It's too bad you have so much noise on your other side."

"You mean the traffic?" he said.

"Yes, and all those cars stopping at the filling-station and everything." She showed him how a supersensitive person is affected.

He said, without seeming to observe her, "No; sometimes people from those cars come in and hear the Word."

He suddenly looked shiny and overbearing and undeserving and she said right out that her father had preached in a white *stone* church. The man didn't get it, the difference, just said she could be a blessing in the community. She was perplexed for a minute by the way he made her feel. Then she told him that she was consecrated.

Herb thought she shouldn't have said she was.

"Why not? I think it was all right to. I've seen you chatting with him."

Herb would talk with him about things like trimming the hedges even on both sides of the alley, but Vacia never spoke to him again. She had dropped the project of their improvement after she couldn't get the City to move them to a quiet field. The mayor's wife was in her P.T.A. and one day when she phoned, Vacia thought maybe the mayor was going to contact her about the project through his wife, but all the woman wanted to know was whether since Vacia was a college woman she could arrange to substitute at their school 'cause so many members of the staff had been sick. Mrs. Ellason said a mother couldn't look after children all day and all night too.

Vacia's intercourse with her neighborhood had for the last few years consisted of her particular kind of overseeing which she personalized by sending little Bees around with bunches of flowers from her profuse garden. Except to one household. Vacia was satisfied merely to watch the premises of the refractory Zaffs until they moved out and left her guessing who would succeed them. She'd say to some woman hired to stretch curtains or to a man washing her walls that she was on the lookout every minute to see which househunters appeared to be seriously interested in the place.

"I'd like to help them get started right. You can expect your neighbors to take too much when you go into a house."

The woman stretching or the man washing would not dispute her.

"I'm so far from being the jealous type I don't know all the mean-

ing of the word. You can't be jealous when you're public-spirited. Now nobody around me ever had things I wanted; because I got them first or if I didn't it was because I thought of them but convinced myself I didn't want them. I guess I'm naturally ephical from my father. I *am* a believer in that neighbors should know their neighborhood."

She began to fret aloud as Herb's vacation drew near.

"Maybe some family will move in while we're stuck up in the woods in a cabin," she moaned.

"They'll be part of the neighborhood when we get back" was all Herb said.

Then one blowy day from her watching-room she saw the woman, Mrs. Meek, peering concentratedly around the garage; and she slipped down to the kitchen to take out some garbage. The woman had begun poking curiously at a little tump of ground; so Vacia made a noise with the garbage-can lid to make her look. She jumped like she'd been thinking she was in a separate world and turned toward Vacia, who was ready first with a smile that required a smile from the stranger and then with a question:

"Are you buying it?"

The woman, sort of making her eyes about five times brighter, just said, "Maybe."

"You may think it's not complete without a fence or a hedge; but it would have a hedge if the Zaffs had put one in when I told them to. They talked about an iron fence — around that place! We don't have anything but pickets or hedges — or *nothing*, like here. Look around and see."

Mrs. Ellason showed her down the block that the Bryans and Taukets and Merdens and Scolls all had hedges; in the breeze the bushes were bowing down and up like strings of festooned chorus girls dramatizing the neighborhood unity.

"We like a hedge or a picket — in our street. There is one couple — the Trampes — have an iron fence but are not in our block."

The woman glanced around as if she might be estimating the length of hedge the Zaffs' yard should have had.

Vacia went on friendly to give all the hints a new woman'd need and even told her a little about some of the close neighbors — like Mr. Fraction's brother drinking — but said not to mind him unless she wanted to weatherstrip. The Fractions always came in late because of their tavern.

"I hear my husband's signal," said Mrs. Meek. "Thank you for all the intimate sketches. I'll endeavor to keep them straight — *if* we do buy this place." That was how she talked — a-different — and acted sort of sweet-and-stiff like thin, striped peppermint candy.

That was all Vacia heard out of her and nothing at all from her husband; he closed her up in the car preciousy and then whisked around himself like a wind. Vacia could not guess which one *was* buying the house. But they did buy and just got moved in when Herb's vacation took Vacia away — and in only two weeks, when she got back, if there wasn't a wire fence and within a week a dog in the yard. Mrs. Meek, as if guiltily conscious of her haste, seemed to be in hiding, but whenever she appeared in the evening Vacia would wander over and be neighborly.

"I haven't found out which one bought the house," she reported to Herb. "When I'm over in their yard, they just smile and listen and then when I stop to let them tell me something, they're just there waiting like two great big nasturtiums."

Looking down realistically one morning she could see at once something about Mrs. Meek — something like herself before she and Herb moved out of their first place . . . That day she cut all of her e-numerable flowers and divided them into four beautiful bunches and she sent little Bees around to each house as usual with flowers for the week-end to Merdens, Fractions, Meeks — and even to the trailer, the Crofts. And when Bees said what Mrs. Meek looked like when she came to the door Vacia knew she was going to have a baby.

House, fence, dog, and next a baby.

Somehow, unseen, Mrs. Meek gave her bouquet to the trailer for Sunday morning decoration in the Rejected-Stone Church. Herb had said the evangelist thanked him for the second bunch of flowers, and Vacia, fretting lest Bees had doubled on the Crofts and skipped the Meeks, ferreted out Mrs. Meek's partiality.

Vacia heard the dog barking on Sunday morning. In the afternoon it barked when the man stopped throwing a stick for it to catch. Monday morning it barked at the milkman. Then, as if its owners had learned that the barking would spoil a customary quiet and harmony, it didn't bark, hadn't been seen since Monday. Vacia appreciated the change as she lay up on the couch testing herself on her mottoes, waiting for the moon and a change in the atmosphere. She heard her husband come in downstairs.

"Gone to bed already?" he called.

She went in to the top of the stairs. "Bees is asleep. And I'm getting in now —"

"There's a nice breeze coming," he told her from the hall and went in to hear his mysteries.

Wednesday was his late night at the radio. He could look after the closing up tonight.

What disturbing rumpus was —? Part of one of Herb's Arsenic Murders? Perhaps. He was not in bed. Yet, listening, she heard him go out the back door. She got up. From her watch she saw and heard imperfectly. The moon hid behind the Meeks' place, and the commotion was between the Fractions' and the trailer. It looked like the drinking Fraction — she couldn't be sure, it was so dark there. A crashing clunk and a crying and the figure in a mad mummery as if maybe he'd drunk poison. Then he went in and banged the door and the trailer got all lit up and then one dumpish form was speeding over to the church where they were down in the basement for their healing; then two forms moved in stumbling pantomime from temple to trailer and shut themselves in . . . That must be Herb bringing the man out of the Fractions'. She couldn't hear! The breeze had come up and there were too many trees . . . The trailer opened — She went downstairs and put on the lights to draw some of them over; but they went over to the new people and right in — Herb with the others.

Vacia met him at the door when he came back and he put his hands across the door as if he thought she was going out to see what it was.

"You stay out of this, Vacia. This is the kind of thing we should never have anything to do with."

"Of course," she said. "We're mutual. Don't I always follow your advice? But what is it?"

He went right up to his workroom. She could hear him fiddling around his desk and his file and things, and she followed him there.

"Can't we help whoever's in trouble — you know I want to. What happened, Herb?"

"Joe Fraction threw one of their bricks in a window of the Crofts' trailer and it fell on the little boy. That's what happened."

"He threw a brick —!"

"He was half drunk and he got so mad reading a letter he found when he came in he didn't even read it to the end. It said the writers were sorry if some noise had disturbed anyone in his house but if someone had only come to them and talked over any annoyance no

secret methods would of been needed."

"Whoever would write such a letter!"

"He thought it was that healer talking about his late preaching and praying, and trying to get him over for a cure. When I read the letter to the end we knew the evangelist didn't write it. He denied it without reading it; and he could. 'Twas signed: Your New Neighbors, Mr. and Mrs. Meek. Before I could stop Crofts to tell him, he was over to the Meeks' phoning for the doctor for his son."

"Can't he heal his own child? He's always healing somebody else's."

Herb talked on as if he didn't hear. "Joe Fraction will probly go to jail; he says it's where he belongs."

"But the Meeks — what did they —?"

"The Meeks are dazed. She peered at her own letter like a wraith at a page of the judgment book and said, yes, she wrote the letter."

"Admitted it. But why?"

"In answer to one from the Fractions saying their dog annoyed them in the mornings when they needed their sleep. I saw the letter she got — I tried to get hold of it — to keep. To see if I —"

"I wish you would of. Did you notice how it was signed?"

"'Your Neighbor' was all. They thought the Fractions must a wrote it."

"You *can't* tell who wrote a letter like that."

"This letter was typed. Mr. Meek asked us all who'd write such a thing. I want to know for sure who did write that thing. That's an anonymous letter." He threw back the carriage of his typewriter as if he was practicing to hit someone.

"Don't be so simple," said Vacia. "I composed it and typed it too. Didn't you know my spacing you say is so bad? I didn't sign my name. I decided to put Your Neighbor instead; that always seems more Christian."

"You didn't *really*?"

"I can prove it, 'cause I have a carbon; you go away and I'll get it out."

He wouldn't go, watched her dig up a folder from his file.

"And what are these other — carbons?" There were three. He stared from one to another as if he would bore them all over with holes.

"You can read them better than that," she said, "I'm not that bad of a typer. And just for that I won't let you see them." She snatched them away.

"I don't want to. I recognized your mistakes, but I —"

"I'd of died, Herb, if you had."

He looked away from her. "Mrs. Meek looked ready to die. And Joe Fraction never sobered up faster in his life. And now that little b—"

Vacia touched his arm. "The Crofts are good Christians," she said, "and will forgive Mr. Fraction. Then it'll be just as if Mrs. Meek didn't write their letter either."

Herb turned on her as if she were saying somebody else's words. He looked like another person too, a hateful person, and whispered at her with needles in his breath: "Their! — You get to bed, and you keep out of everything!"

The cleaning-woman without knowledge was an unseen comfort at first, but she stayed too long in the basement working a general improvement on the cast-off paraphernalia of campers. Vacia began to feel uncanny as well as neglected, for Herb had gone early without breakfast or even lifting in the milk bottles.

When she came in from her garden and the woman was still in the basement, she called down the stairs. "You better start cleaning upstairs."

The woman came up to the kitchen. "You sure got a load of flowers!" she said.

"Bunches of cheer for my neighbors." Mrs. Ellason slipped an arc of bleeding-heart through a buttonhole at the neck of her own playsuit. "They're ready now, Bees dear."

"You can come way upstairs and work down," she said, preceding her servant. "We had a min-ature quake round here last night and nobody knows what to expect."

"Oh? Didn't get in the morning paper."

"No — I'd think not!" Then as if to prove its potential news-value, she gave such an unreserved version that the woman questioned nothing but she could tell Mrs. Ellason that them letters without a real name at the end made some people plenty mad. How she knew was from reading the little boxed feature in the paper about pet peeves. One morning it was a man blowing off about those anonymous letters.

"I never seen one myself; fact I never knew anybody who wrote one before," said the woman. Whether her luck was in the past or the present was indeterminable.

"Didn't you? My husband didn't sound as if he thought I knew what one is. Why I know. And you do too now. And that man who's peeved is one-sided. Why they can become great. Most don't, of course. But they had them in the Bible like the writing on the wall — that was one kind, and I read a grand story in *Photo Winks* that told how a woman found out how much her husband loved her on account of one. You can't condemn them if they do good; can you?"

The cleaning-woman did not have the answer; she only said, "You sure act kind-spirited," borrowing the combination Vacia had used repeatedly to qualify her own part in the shadowy affair. "I'd think you'd a rested, stead of cuttin all those flowers —"

"Maybe I'll relax out here." Vacia got back to her windowed room on time to see Bees returning from across the alley and still carrying the bunches of flowers.

The child left them downstairs and came up to her mother. Nobody had opened up except at the Meeks'. There it was Mr. Meek who came to the door and told her thank you but they had all the flowers they had vases for. "Shall I take all the flowers to the trailer?" she asked. "There's a crepe on it."

"A crepe where? I didn't see it. Where do they hang it when it's on a trailer?"

Vacia tried different slants from different windows, but she could not see. "Yes. Take them *all* over, Bees," she called.

Dear, dear! Mrs. Meek would feel terrible now — and maybe lose her baby the way Vacia herself did that time. She wanted to help her . . . She must think of some way.

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GUDGER BART LEIPER:

Ladies Who Play the Quarter Machines At Mountain Resorts

More intimate than garrulous, frivolous dice
Are the long strong arms of slot machines:
Stag-studs, vacation males, lovers for hire
Windowing their wares like sailors in tight whites
At waterfront bars.
Unique seduction, curious coition:
The neat trick of balancing a bourbon and soda
In pink, puffy, ring-choked fingers
Throughout the whole damn act.

*O down in the valley the Tennessee flows
And the tall green corn in long, long rows
Rustles in the wind from the Tennessee hills
And the night freight whistles on the bottomland fills
. . . Chickamaugas return, return to the hills
To the Five Valley Towns come back again . . .*

In the whirring and clicking of gambling gears
The quick, cold spasm of being,
All of life's unlived living, plus
The added assurance
— Pimping, grinning, nigger barboy *declahs!* —
That almost every evening you collect the day's reward,
And Heaven's the metallic belch
Of a jack-pot's guts.

*O the wind is long and the wind is lean
And the mountain wind is cold and clean
And dew on the crabgrass gleams in the night
And crickets hollar in the moon's bright light
. . . Chickamaugas return, return to the river
To the Five Valley Towns come back again . . .*

Discovered in the act by undiscovering husbands,
 Detected in scandal by corona-coronas, and flash-bulbed
 In the beams of little finger diamonds
 (The Pride of Dunhill, scraping the air
 With a wheeze as he quotes the latest tel and tel
 And fumes about that upstart filly at Pimlico)
 Found out by the furious scratching of the rectum's sudden itch,
 Casually ends the brief rendezvous.

*O the guineas are scared and stutter at the moon
 And the old coon hound has treed a coon
 And the moon is yellor and the moon is big
 And a mockin' bird sings on the plumb top twig
 . . . Chickamaugas return, return to the bottoms
 To the Five Valley Towns come back again . . .*

Out then on the fashionable flags to the Patio Terrace
 Neonic geometry clinging to the cliffs' time-nicked edge
 Like a midnight drunk on the terrible curb:
 A horseshoe of light pods rattling
 In the night's cold breath.
 Fierce fingers of the wind snatch
 Syrup-sounds from clarinet throats
 And fling hot, throbbing calypso notes
 Among red clay clods of a Georgia corn patch.

*O down on the battlefield the Chickamauga winds
 And sighs are in the cedars and persimmons and pines
 And cries are in the creekbed at Alexander's Bridge
 And the dust ain't settled along Taylor's Ridge
 O whines are in the winds up on Snodgrass Hill
 And the water trickles red past Gordon's Mill
 . . . Chickamaugas return, return to the valley
 To the Five Valley Towns come back again . . .*

They assume a stupid, idiot's stance,
 Cold, awkward, habitual embrace of the dance,
 And trace absurd geometry on the weathered wax.
 High on a locust pole lolls a sheet-metal moon
 Like a blonde on the make in a cheap barroom.

*O the moon is a-setten and the river rolls on
 And all the valley shivers in the silent dawn
 And the castrated cannon under cedar trees
 Look cro-magnonic in the day's new breeze
 . . . Chickamaugas return, return to the land
 To the Five —*

"Christ, baby! Ain't that trumpet the hottest thing
 Since Bix blew his horn in the spot's blue ring!"

*O the sheet-metal moon's killed its last June bug
 And the cigarette girl's got her last drunk's hug
 . . . Chickamaugas return, re —*

"Aw come on, honey; Star Dush jush once more."
 "Ten! Dice, you hear me talkin! Dice, come on!
 I love ya, Dice. Tennessee Tom!"
 "Who the hell ya callin a goddam whore!"

*O the barboy snores behind the washroom door
 And the slot machine's whirr is heard no more
 . . . Chicka —*

Hey, buddy, who the hell's this Chickamaugas?

ROBERT THACKABERRY:

For Lewis Carroll: Academic Regression

Weighted with sleep she dropped to the
 internal life, fell upon free
 desires. Where weskits can direct
 where tiny doors of introspec-
 tion, opening, can lead, she went.

So he who made her innocent

returned:

The stream blue-cold but fought
against, shows at its height a taut
nexus of ciliated reeds
through which the rival seeds,
like silver fish, immerge.

Beyond
the hairy screen, the purple pond
is the warm garden of content
before our fall, is an event
reversible.

Like him we shall
return by diets magical
and swift, shall see her at the trial
where our impetuous denial
of having murdered time is halted
by mimes of parents we exalted.
Like him through her we shall defy
that mother whose discerning eye
ousted the painted roses, made
those who were credulous afraid.

O, Alice, psyche, pneuma, wit,
too gross or too minute to fit
the world, should we by penitence
achieve the womb and should our sense
of order make us keep our head,
teach us to be discomfited
who read the books of your negation:
no pictures and no conversation.

ROGER SHATTUCK:

Paris Letter

The most frightening physical fact about Paris is not immediately apparent. The architectural variety of her bridges, her public buildings and her residences seems if anything reassuring and solid, and the advance of the seasons endlessly discovers new life in even the oldest stones. Nevertheless the distant danger in the present state of things slowly reveals itself. It is that there has been almost no new construction in Paris for the past ten years and there is none being started now. After a short stay in the city, one begins to notice how often in the older quarters the gaps left by condemned and razed buildings have to be bridged by stout, wooden supports so that the buildings on either side will not fall into the open space. This state of affairs is inevitable if the war-destroyed cities elsewhere in the country are to be rebuilt swiftly, but one wonders at times if Paris will be saved from a gradually accelerating process of crumbling back into a rich and historic topsoil.

This figure is one way of approaching the basic condition of Paris, a city where goods are still distributed by an astonishing number of small shops, where people speak dully of war and the short distances in Europe, and where there seem to be more *flics* (policemen) than necessary idling in the streets in anticipation of trouble. The hotels are full of Europe's homeless, rich and poor, unable either to make the final step of emigration to South America or to turn back to the limbo of Eastern Europe. Theirs is a miraculous survival and certainly one of the significant phenomena of our time. In this atmosphere many things flourish, among which are art and the imitation of art.

I stress the architectural situation of Paris because it is, in my opinion, profoundly analogous to her whole artistic state of health. Since the era of Surrealism in literature and of Cubism in art (and their rapid intermingling), there has been little new construction, little new territory explored. These two movements have been disposed of a thousand times, yet each remains one of the last plottable points in France's cultural development. Since the liberation two identifiable movements have earned a name: Existentialism and Lettrism — both of them efforts in the direction of new building. But to my mind the former is in essence a means of clearing the ground for the future, and the latter no more than a temporary structure.

In spite of some persistent foolishness, Existentialism has finally outlived the ill effects of wide publicity and proved itself a serious approach to contemporary problems. It is illuminating to compare this post-war phenomenon with what came to the surface after the first war: Dada. Both have faced squarely the deep consciousness of absurdity which haunts a wartime generation. But whereas Dada held onto the absurd as if it were itself an *objet trouvé*, a thing of value, Sartre and his followers have seen it as the great "in spite of which." We must act practically and politically in spite of the precipice at our side. This aspect of Existentialism, its *engagement*, reveals more maturity than Dada, yet it has remained principally a philosophical movement, influencing the content and not the form of literature. It must be remembered that there is no Existential poetry, nor could there be. Sartre's recent

long essay on Baudelaire establishes more clearly the attitude of this school toward verse. Sartre is interested in Baudelaire morally, psychologically, biographically, and metaphysically — but to no great extent poetically. This is not quite the same as the romantic cult of the artist's rich, wonderful life, but it ignores the central problem of the quality of the work produced. What characterizes Existentialism is a moral preoccupation, a concern which turns more to conduct than to the shapings of a refined sensibility.

Sartre's most recently produced play, *Les Mains Sales*, bears out most of these points. In this hugely successful work, he put aside completely the real flair for poetic language revealed in his early plays. A stripped and intense dialogue, strongly influenced by the cinema, pounds doggedly but fascinatingly at the central theme: a man's equivocally motivated deed of violence and his desperate yearning for purity of motivation. The play is not anti-communist as that adjective would be understood in America. It is against a certain form of blind communism in which the powers of free choice are abdicated, but the hero is never censured for not renouncing his communist convictions. All this is no oversimplification. Sartre's talents as well as his faults are those of a Sophist, for with these simple propositions he constructs a highly dramatic play of complication and paradox. The pastiche of his style is yet to be written. It would be, perhaps, a sketch in two scenes. The first would consist of a world-shaking debate between two men, one of whom at the end replies with disconcerting profundity to the clinching argument of the other: "But *au fond* that is exactly what I have been saying, etc." The second is a sort of beatific love scene, full of mutual understanding but shattered by one lover after an exchange of harmonious agreement: "But *au fond* that's completely different, etc." *Les Mains Sales* is a powerful and well produced play, but its most interesting theme, that of private and political purity, is undeveloped. The most meaningful line of the evening is said by the hero, Hugo, to the woman who converted him to communism and is now judging him. "You taught me purity." Is Sartre afraid of this sudden view into the depths?

The other literary movement which has succeeded in making itself known is Lettrism. To continue the analogy already begun, it resembles nothing so much as the Housing Exposition which was held here last summer in a vacant area along the Seine. Some quite wonderful prefabricated and modernly equipped houses were erected, and Parisians paraded through them on weekends. However there was no thought that any such shelter would ever be inhabited despite the housing shortage, and all has now been torn down. In the same way as these buildings were only demonstrations of what can be done with construction material, Lettrism is (it is not too soon to say "was") a literary invention which stresses certain affinities of words with music but which cannot itself be considered literature. Its adherents do not even seem to be aware of the phonetic ambiguity of what they write, for since it is not in any language, it has no rules of pronunciation. Where Existentialism has done a conscientious job of clearing the ground and digging the foundations for new construction, Lettrism has simply thrown up a temporary shack.

But if the new building is rare and often flimsy, the time-tried structures still hold up admirably. The theatre season of the past winter was distinguished by several excellent new productions of Molière's and Shakespeare's works —

too many, in fact, to mention them all. The outstanding performances were by the Comédie Française in a lively recreation of *Le Misanthrope*, by Louis Jouvet in a highly versatile version of *Don Juan*, and by Jean-Louis Barrault in a beautiful production of *Amphytrion*, which balanced delicately between burlesque and allegory. Shakespeare received equally frequent but less successful treatment.

Several other plays should be mentioned for various qualities, but *Le Maître de Santiago* of Henry de Montherlant distinguishes itself above the rest. A religious play about an egoistic Spanish mystic in the sixteenth century and his relationship to his daughter, it carries a tremendous impact of conviction and has passages of profoundly moving dialogue. Garcia-Lorca's *Yerma* also had a good run and a sensitive production in the small experimental theatre of the Studio des Champs Elysées. It is the opposite of a work like *Les Mains Sales*, for, being almost completely without action, it relies upon the poetic rendering of the emotions of a few characters. The speeches are beautiful and unhurried, but despite some very compelling moments, the play is not dramatically satisfying, especially in translation. The impression of a long recitation is unavoidable.

The categories of "new" and "old" that I began by using are certainly not wide enough to include the whole of the present scene. In fact, the writer I especially wish to speak of is both old and new — Jean Cocteau, who brings forth books (except novels), drawing, films, ballets and plays. This fecundity is appalling, and several recent works have been unsatisfactory. The ballet, *Le Jeune Homme et la Mort*, verges at every moment — but without succumbing — on pantomime and on gymnastic, and the violence of the movements would be beyond the powers of any dancer without the magnificent assurance of Jean Babilée. The film, *La Belle et la Bête*, is remarkable for its sets and for its description of semi-human pathos; yet as cinema it is heavy-handed. Another film, *Les Parents Terribles*, has not yet been released. *La Crucifixion*, however, a long poem depicting that event in natural but deeply disturbing terms, is a work of highly accomplished artistry. It moves subtly between serenity (*Sérénissime*, it begins) and violence and touches a very personal note. Cocteau's most recent book, *La Difficulté d'Etre*, is a collection of short essays and reflections upon various aspects of art, along with sections of personal reminiscence on Apollinaire and Radiguet. It is the sustained brilliant writing of a man whose observation is acute and who is now almost incapable of producing an uninteresting paragraph. One of the sections is called "De la Ligne" and contains the following passage:

Qu'est-ce que la ligne? C'est la vie. Une ligne doit vivre sur chaque point de son parcours de telle sorte que la présence de l'artiste s'impose davantage que celle du modèle. La foule juge d'après la ligne du modèle sans comprendre qu'il peut disparaître au bénéfice de celle du peintre, pourvu que sa ligne vive d'une vie propre. Par la ligne j'entends la permanence de la personnalité.

In these words Cocteau has himself supplied the terms best applicable to him. He has found his "line." With the single exception of Gide, no other contemporary French author has been able so consistently to *soigner sa ligne* independent of extraneous or enveloping loyalties. The revelation of the artistic personality has been undeviating and is now nearly complete. Cocteau has reached us through the perilous periods of Dada, Surrealism and inter-war artistic groping.

His line is none of these; it bears only his own name.

Cocteau's recent works, varied as they are, often recall earlier efforts — the film, *Le Sang d'un Poète*, and *Lettre à Jacques Maritain*. I find these two the seminal points, the purest moments. They have generated a line which is best described as a kind of literary anarchism, not a lack of order but a search for order according to new principles of association. Being the opposite of the Renaissance man in whom a wealth of sensibilities were easily reconciled, Cocteau, the twentieth century artist, must strive to reconcile the many sensibilities he is prey to. Although his line is clear and straight, he has not yet produced his masterpiece. For such a man as he in the world today, it may be an inevitable fate to die without the culminating work. It is something however *to have been* and *to have found it difficult*.

In fiction the French are producing no great riches. The Americans still have the upper hand. Camus' and Sartre's latest novels have both been translated, and there is no need for me to devote space to them here. Only one other novel merits notice in my estimation. It is *Les Forêts de la Nuit* by Jean-Louis Curtis. What distinguishes the book is the clearness of perspective with which it treats the years under the occupation. The harried, compromised and not very admirable lives of several Frenchmen are described with a thoroughness and a sympathy that nevertheless spares no ugliness. Mild collaboration, black market, love, all shades of patriotism, lost youth — these fit into a rich picture centered in a small town in the South of France, with some scenes in Paris. The characters are carefully worked out, and there is no haste in their presentation. Although usually relieved by the deep humanity of Curtis' sensibility, the restrained bitterness of the book is unmistakable in the similarity of the "hero" and the "villain." Both are handsome youths of striking physical qualities, schoolmates whose eventful lives bring them together again later to commit an act of heroism. The hero dies, but his heroism is not the subject of the novel; the villain suffers, and the weakness of the book's structure is his unconvincing regeneration through a symbolic murder. Nevertheless, *Les Forêts de la Nuit* has a calm, unlabored strength that is especially rare among novels on the war years. The only other work of fiction I want to mention is the highly poetic and sensitive *Labyrinthes* by L.-P. Guigues, who possesses some of the mysterious analytic powers of Proust.

Although the novel languishes, one category of criticism is in good repute: books on painters. The two most outstanding are *Juan Gris* by Daniel-Henry Kahnweiler and *Van Gogh, le Suicidé de la Société* by Antonin Artaud. The former, a long and complete study of the life and work of Gris by his first dealer and lifelong friend, is close to being definitive. However, where it might have proved a book of great importance by offering a new insight into Cubism, it has failed to point up the most essential distinctions. The essentially "literary" quality of Expressionism and the purely "plastic" quality of Cubism are brought up; yet this difference needs explanation and illustration. Artaud's book, by contrast, is almost a personal tribute to Van Gogh's artistic genius. The slim volume is a frenzied, half-poetic condemnation of the society which drove a rare artistic temperament to suicide. Now that Artaud has died, there is renewed attention to his varied career as actor, poet, artist, script writer, and man of endless protest and violence. Yet, despite the power of the diatribe, I find this book disappointing. A calmer approach (cf. an article by Meyer Shapiro

in an old issue of *View*) is a greater tribute to both the personality of the artist and his work.

Space does not permit me here to discuss what has happened in the arts themselves. Recent shows have revealed Léger and Braque still working with authority. Klee, Redon, Puvis de Chavannes, David, and (best of all) Georges de la Tour have all been collected in important exhibitions.

In contrast to the other media I have described, poetry comes into existence slowly and often without recognition. The stillness of the present scene is perhaps deceptive. Supervielle continues to write with an increasing lucidity and sonority. His *Choix de Poèmes* is one of the most important volumes in recent years. At the same time, two young poets have appeared tentatively on the horizon, Olivier Larronde and Henri Pichette. The former writes with the limpidity and density of Mallarmé or Valéry, but in reading him one is troubled with the same kind of uncomfortable incredulity as upon hearing a six-year-old prodigy play a difficult Beethoven sonata. Pichette is equally difficult to read, but in an entirely different vein. Calling his works "Apoèmes" he writes violent passages of great imaginative flavor. The impression is somewhat surrealist, for although his individual sentences are understandable, he leaves between sentences gaps of association that are vast. Nevertheless Pichette's wildness seems far more natural than Larronde's beautiful but strained balance. Another figure, Malcolm de Chazal, has recently made something of a splash with a book of hyper-imaginative and virtuoso aphorisms called *Sens-Plastique*. The incomplete study that I have given it allows me to say only that it is not poetry but a variety of inspired occultist or hermetic writing which nevertheless keeps a firm grasp on the natural world. Swedenborg and Blake are the comparisons one immediately makes.

I conclude this letter in the unreality of mid-August in Paris. It is, literally, a month of Sundays. Half of the shops are shut, and as many of every family as can be afforded are in the country or at the seaside. For those residents who stay now in Paris after having felt the spring surge out of the winter, August is a very special month. It brings a kind of tension, of suspense. Any disturbance is immediately felt. Little events like the striking of a clock or the passing of a cloud over the sun become unaccountably important. Because life moves languidly, nothing can change or act without being noticed. And Paris shivers in the unexpectedness of a cold summer, while the tourists — American, Scandinavian and English — swarm uncertainly about a few centers and wonder where the French have gone. Even the waiter speaks English.

Paris, when she returns at the end of the month, will be engaged upon no crusades; her complete faith lies neither in transcendent values nor in the efficacy of any social or political reorganization. The new government will bring no profound changes. The hybrid and cosmopolitan population will live on with just a little more bread and coal for the coming winter. There is no doubt that this last war has aged Paris considerably, and the required effort of self-renewal is not being made with any easy assurance. Although I have stressed it insufficiently in this letter, France is committed to a period of self-criticism. Existentialism is one of the manifestations, but any conversation over the zinc of a café is more convincing evidence. When she has assimilated or regurgitated the various influences she is prey to, such as the American novel,

the Italian film and the politics of tergivers communists, France will, if the world still spins peacefully, start building again.

Paris

August, 1948

CHARLES SHATTUCK

Theatre for People

BERTOLT BRECHT: *Parables for the Theatre: The Good Woman of Setzuan* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. English versions by Eric and Maja Bentley. University of Minnesota Press.

In the preface to *L'Amour médecin* Molière reminded his readers that comedies are written only to be played, and recommended the book of this particular play "only to such persons as have the eyes to see, from the mere reading, *tout le jeu du théâtre*." Some such directive needs to be posted for the readers of the comedies of Bertolt Brecht — not to apologize for them, as Molière was doing, but to underscore the fact that they are made for the stage rather than the study, and nothing less than *tout le jeu du théâtre* will suffice. We have been spoiled since Menander into expecting our comedy characters to be well-typed, case-hardened, predictable. Since the Elizabethans we have expected them to be fully, even floridly verbalized. Since Ibsen and Shaw we expect scenery and business and even the main ideas to be laid out for us entire. So drama has gradually become "literature," and we expect to read a play with the same floating ease and drowsing half-minds that get us through books-of-the-month and the funny papers.

Don't read a Brecht play with a drowsing half-mind. Start it right after breakfast, and stay with it as long as your energy holds up. Take it slow and careful, and watch for the signs.

Not that Brecht is obscure, obtuse, tortured. Quite the contrary. He is direct, plainspoken. He writes the accurate language that one must master to carry on good conversation with intelligent children: the difficulty of keeping in touch with him is in reviving in ourselves the alertness and good faith that we used to have before we learned to accept substitutes.

And we must bring into our reading *tout le jeu du théâtre*: not of course a bundle of cliché preconceptions, but a very lively sense for how theatric art can be used anew to underscore Brecht's meanings.

He never prescribes the décor. The Prologue of *The Good Woman* takes place in "*A street. It is evening.*" Scene One is in "*A small tobacco store. The store is not as yet completely furnished and has not opened.*" This tells us nothing. We know that Setzuan is in China, but the very starkness of the stage-direction warns us that kodachrome realism from the *National Geographic* will be irrelevant. Something flexible, easy, unified, at once naive and suggestive

is called for. Flat-looking cutouts, or cyclorama projections of cartoonish simplicity, like pictographs, will help. In any case, the scenery must be economical: must simply state the *idea* of the place, never *describe* it. And it must never call attention to its own involutions. The play is too important to be cluttered with "decoration."

The openness of character portrayal in Brecht's plays will be even more hazardous to the casual reader, who is used to sharp types, defined by stature, complexion, costume, social caste, employment, and dialect. Brecht merely writes down the essences: it is up to the actor to gather the clues and build the "character" himself, bringing to it his own *jeu du théâtre*. The essences are there, the accidents are to be imagined. I once directed a school-production of *The Three Penny Opera*, and since then I have seen it twice more. The Mackie Messers and the Papa Peachums were creatures from three different worlds, and all of them were satisfying — right. Not right in the way that three different Marchbankses may be more or less right in approaching Shaw's ideal Marchbanks, but right in three totally different configurations — right in stating validly one aspect or another of Brecht's multitudinous meaning. Or again, having read *The Chalk Circle* (manuscript) two or three times, I had the good luck this fall to see a performance of it at the Hedgerow Theatre. There, among many other good things, was a playing of Grusha's brother Lavrenti that was both masterful and startling. Out of the dry, non-committal words on the page, the actor evolved a sad, beaten, fearful, cunning, henpecked, stupid, tender, lovable, despicable hunk, which as you see is indescribable and which as you see I shall never forget. And by no means was it definitive. In all likelihood it will be quite unlike any other player's rendition of the same role — not only in degree, but perhaps in kind. Brecht invites and compels actors, directors, designers, spectators — and readers — to think freshly and pay attention to meaning.

Do not be betrayed by the simplicity of the language into a notion that the language is childish or unimportant. It is child-like and *very* important. You will not find here that the morn in russet mantle clad walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill, or stands jocund and tiptoe on the misty mountain top, or even comes up like thunder. The elaborate metaphor, decorative or expansive, is not in Brecht's vocabulary. See how the dawn comes up for Shen Te of Setzuan after she has spent the night with her lover:

I've never seen the town in the early morning before . . . I walked among the newspaper boys, among the men who rinse the pavement with water, and among the ox carts that bring fresh vegetables from the country. I've walked a long way from Sun's neighborhood over here, but I've been getting merrier at every step. I've always been told that if you're in love you walk on clouds, but the best thing is walking on the earth, on the pavement. I tell you, in the morning rows of houses look like rubbish heaps with lights on them. The sky is pink and transparent because there's no dust yet. I tell you, you miss much if you're not in love, if you don't see your Setzuan at the hour it rises from sleep like a sober old craftsman pumping his lungs full of fresh air and reaching for his tools, as the poets say.

Metaphor, as in the last sentence, carries with it the honest folk practice of apology by ascription. Everywhere you look are the simplest things:

Judgment must always be pronounced with absolute gravity — why? because it's such nonsense.

Good men
Cannot long remain good in our country.
Where plates are empty, the diners fight.

When I was unjust I walked mightily about and ate good meat.

A fart has no nose.

Terrible is the temptation of goodness.

Or, for a lyrical passage, the farewell of Grusha to her newly betrothed, Simon Shashava:

Go calmly into battle, soldier
The bloody battle, the bitter battle
From which not everyone returns:
When you return I shall be there.
I shall be waiting for you under the green elm
I shall be waiting for you under the bare elm
I shall wait until the last soldier has returned
And longer.
When you come back from the battle.
No boots will lie before the door
The pillow beside me will be empty
And my mouth will be unknissed.
When you return, when you return
You will be able to say: All is as it was.

Language like this, in the context of action, is poetry in and of the theatre — moving to laughter like the most casual grunts of Falstaff, moving to tears like Cordelia's "No cause, no cause" — re-achieving, I would say, the art of stage-poetry without the least phony echo of the blank-verse masters of the past.

Readers will probably prefer *The Good Woman* to *The Chalk Circle* at the first sampling, partly for the obvious beauty it gives off, and partly for the wrong reason that its fable progresses in a manner more nearly resembling our conventional idea of a play. But *The Chalk Circle* should be studied with especial care. It has more colors on the palette, more sting to it, more earthy comment. A Brecht play is built and moves casually, episodically, like a play of Aristophanes (whom Brecht much resembles), never quite defining itself, lingering over gags and gimmicks, peering up thighs and through keyholes, rebellious, loving, raucous, and owlshly wise. *The Chalk Circle* is the more Brechtian of the two in structure and in flavor.

Neither of these plays is likely to be seen in the Big Time very soon, because it takes so much more than money to produce them. But meanwhile school and community theatres are and will be doing them all over the country, so the people will get to see them. Which is how Brecht seems to prefer it anyway. He never cared for the money-changers in our theatrical temples, and since our Unamerican Committee tried, vainly, to pillory him, he has dusted us off as a nation and gone to Zurich. But he likes people in theatres everywhere, and the people can have his plays.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Mr. and Mrs. Bentley and the Minnesota Press for making these available — incidentally for the first time in any language. If someone will now publish *Three Penny Opera* and *Galileo* we shall have the best of Brecht's plays out in the open, where our actors can get at them.

ARTHUR CARR:

The Critical Eye

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN: *The Armed Vision*. Alfred A. Knopf.

The Armed Vision is textbook and bible in Mr. Hyman's school for critics. In plan it is a kind of critical Gradus or Comedy — with Hyman as Dante and Vergil — from Edmund Wilson, Yvor Winters, and Van Wyck Brooks in Hell, through the Purgatory of T. S. Eliot, Maud Bodkin, Constance Rourke, and Caroline Spurgeon, to William Empson, R. P. Blackmur, Christopher Caudwell, and I. A. Richards in Heaven, with Kenneth Burke as Beatrice. The "armed vision" becomes the beatific vision, then, of a modern criticism that "uses all there is to use" and is "eclectic," "democratic," "dialectic," and "scientific." This out-of-the-depths arrangement is not historical or logical but strategic. And the strategy succeeds. The tendency that Hyman defines is instantly recognizable; it is not a fiction. One effect of this book should be to advance and strengthen the conscious purposes of practicing critics and to clear some residual bewilderment from the minds of ordinarily literate readers.

Irving Howe has denounced this book (in the *Nation*) as an undertaking that might better have crowned a career than launched one. Maybe a "mature" critic would be more urbane and cautious than Hyman. Certainly a tone so high and mighty and donnish would be insufferable if Hyman were himself a dean. But his brash severity, often really funny and ironic, sometimes exasperatingly fussy and unfair, mainly gives notice of a versatile intelligence in energetic action. The antics are not stupid or vicious.

Yet it is odd and disappointing that a critic who writes spiritedly and persuasively on behalf of Caudwell and Burke does not discuss criticism itself as "symbolic action" nor analyze its role in our culture, in order to clarify the forces at work upon criticism and the forces which criticism brings to bear. Hyman does not extend his view wide enough to see, for example, that Van Wyck Brooks and Cleanth Brooks both seem to be trying, from disparate standpoints, to increase the interest of the literature they study, by providing it with historical scenery and biographical scenario or by a kind of delicate, epithelial surgery upon diaphanous layers of meaning. What now impels critics to an unremitting and sometimes obsessive hunt for added meaning, added riches, is the kind of question that ought to have attracted Hyman's attention. Similar motives and problems appear in the criticism of Empson and Blackmur, in the X-ray-like findings of Spurgeon's studies in imagery, and especially in Burke's clinical procedures — which sometimes offer to thrust the discrete

forms of art back into the generalized mass of human behavior. As an admirer of the "close, technical reading" that marks those critics whom he praises, Hyman might have commented also upon the close, technical style in which they make their discoveries known: the dense syntax and superfetation of ideas often dismaying to the reader who approaches the arcanum of Empson or Burke. One obvious effect of the style is to restrict the audience which serious criticism reaches and to leave academic scholarship and book reviewing to critics of simpler syntax and simpler mind. Is the scientific direction of modern criticism sometimes a form of masked hostility to art? That Hyman does not discuss such matters opens him to the charge of hagiolatry, for the interests and principles of his masters might have led him to study them more objectively and so to outrun them. What we have is very good, however: a summary and a definition of "modern criticism."

"The Armed Vision" (epigraph from Coleridge: "The razor's edge becomes a saw to the armed vision") is Hyman's metaphor for that criticism which encompasses "traditional" criticism, with its eye upon the evaluation of art, yet prefers to move through description and analysis towards a theoretical state of full elucidation, leaving value to declare itself, perhaps, when the whole truth is manifest. "The armed vision" discloses the critic's head bent to the eyepiece of his microscope, his hand rapidly or painfully diagramming whatever the lens focused upon the razor's edge reveals. The critic's lens, I take it, is the critic's method. Although the metaphor is encouraging as it plays up Hyman's wish that criticism should go in "a scientific direction," it is discouraging

Method leading to methodology is the "modern" ideal as Hyman formulates it. Armed criticism wields the arms of method. Its opposite is not to be found in Winters or in Wilson (against whom Hyman carries on a kind of psychological warfare of mistrust and rebuke) but in Mark Van Doren's notion of "private reading," which Hyman calls "the bringing of nothing to bear on literature but the reader's attention." This is the critic without lens, not blind but unarmed. In contrast stands Burke, Hyman's supreme exponent of criticism that is "plural or multiple or many-leveled." Hyman's Ideal Critic would "take over," "steer clear," "discard," and "use"; he would "operate," "make scrapings," and even "scrape away," "proliferate," and turn up "nuggets" — and "do it all himself too." He would "use" only the best of Eliot, Cleanth Brooks, Bodkin, Spurgeon, the concepts (and not the procedures?) of Freud, Marx, Frazer, Jung, and Gestalt Psychology. He would use all there is to use.

So much for the impracticable ideal. Hyman would "demolish" it by the practice of "collective criticism by symposium," a clash of dialectic out of which "truth" should "arise." Although such cooperative criticism "will not become a science" in the "foreseeable future," it moves in the direction of science, pre-

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sumably of "a unified social psychology" that might "absorb anthropology and the other social sciences into one unified science of man." Whether literary criticism will "absorb" the rest or be absorbed itself Hyman does not make altogether clear. He does claim that the proto-scientific methods of modern criticism transcend the fatal defect of private sensibility, which is "unique with the critic and dies with him," whereas "methods will increasingly be capable of objective transmission." An even greater reward is offered: if method is immortal, it is also "democratic," for "by extending method, *more* men can be capable critics." That is, almost anybody can use a microscope.

I doubt that what Hyman wants or thinks we have is a symposium of microscopists. It is no defect of a symposium that it is eclectic and that no one rules the feast. It is not a research project. *The Armed Vision* itself is a kind of symposium, especially useful for its expositions and outlines, which are rapid, detailed, and not too simple. It is eclectic (or "integrative" to use "the good word" for it), and it is dialectic up to the point where Hyman starts fighting his critics rather than helping them to fight it out. Still, *The Armed Vision* does not move in a "scientific direction," and it is an expression of a lively and private sensibility ("frankly both biased and opinionated") exercising its claim to a public hearing. Hyman's severe doctrines of Hard Work and of Using All There Is To Use connote the frontiersman, housewifely thrift, and New England primitivism quite as vividly as they suggest the laboratory technician. His direction is not scientific, except in an honorific sense, unless method, even

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"an integrated and practical methodology," is in itself scientific. Should we not rather say that modern criticism which aims to elucidate, surveying the work of art on many levels and slopes of origin, meaning, and application, and employing the concepts rather than the methods of the psychological and social sciences, is not so much scientific as theological? Or heuristic? It aims to find what is lost or forgotten through lapse of time, lack of taste, or defect of art, and to give the fullest obtainable meaning of the work of art effective influence upon living minds. It seeks not so much objective knowledge (except to use it) as discovery and re-discovery of the poet, the poem, and the reader.

Even though he obscures it, Hyman knows all this and implies it clearly in discussing Blackmur, who is right up there with Burke enjoying practically full beatitude in the front row. Except for G. Wilson Knight, says Hyman, "Blackmur is probably the most eclectic living literary critic." He does not have "a formal method, but rather an amalgam of qualities and emphases." Taking our cue from the fact that Hyman prefers to call his own work "integrative" rather than "eclectic," we may understand why he blesses Blackmur for saying that "the reader is conscientiously left with the poem with the real work yet to do" after the critic's job of work is done. To be sure, this is why literary criticism remains the art which Stanley Hyman practices.

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